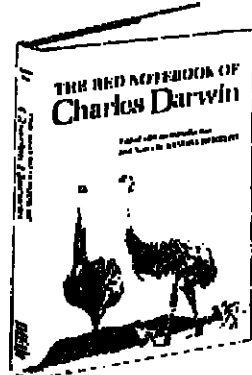




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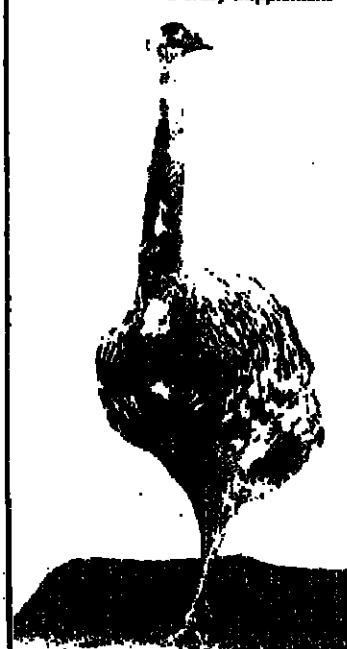
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## THE TIMES LITERARY SUPPLEMENT

JULY 17 1981

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# At the carnival of language

By George Steiner

M. M. BAKHTIN:  
The Dialogic Imagination

Four Essays  
Edited by Michael Holquist  
Translated by Caryl Emerson and  
Michael Holquist  
443pp. University of Texas Press. \$25.  
£29.25 71527 7

Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1973) is difficult to place. He used "masks" (his own term), to vary, to dramatize the range of his interests and intentions. Even to native speakers of Russian, Bakhtin's vocabulary poses difficulties. It is idiosyncratic, full of neologisms, and self-referring, in that key terms presume the reader's familiarity with their use elsewhere in Bakhtin's writings. The destiny of these writings, moreover, reflects both the hazards of survival under the Soviet regime and Bakhtin's own, seemingly anarchic, attitude towards his own work. Much could not be published at all if the author, in exile after 1929, forbidden to issue his famous dissertation on Rabelais until nineteen years after its completion (1946-65), was to stay alive. Other texts were concealed by Bakhtin from all but a clutch of intimates, less because of any immediate threat of censorship and prosecution, than because of his scrupulous, yet also fastidiously ironic, even playful, sense of the integrity of incompleteness and of privacy in his thought.

Provincial relegation, first to Saransk, then to Kimry, war, the vandalism of chaos in the Stalin era, caused the loss or destruction of important manuscripts. At least three books - on the Marxist philosophy of language, on Formalism and literary scholarship, and a Marxist critique of Freud - appeared pseudonymously, and the full extent of Bakhtin's authorship in them remains unclear. Available to Western readers are Bakhtin's *Rabelais and his World* (published in English in 1968), *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (a translation of the second edition appeared in the United States in 1973), and a number of essays included in English, French or German-language journals and in collections of semiotic, structuralist and Formalist readings. In its aspects of "muck", of pseudonymity, of stylistic polyphony, Bakhtin's technique recalls Kierkegaard's. Their privacy of idiom, the elements of external ruin and of self-suppression

which characterize the history of Bakhtin's works, bring to mind Walter Benjamin.

The glossary provided at the close of this compendium of four essays is indispensable. Each individual, affirms Bakhtin, inhabits his own language-world and conceptual-semantic system. This in-dwelling signifies that every human individual is also an "otherness", *une alterité* (*cenzoj*) to every other human being. The perpetual compulsion and irreducible difficulties of dialogue, of reciprocal understanding, stem immediately from this monadic condition (the affinities with Leibniz are unmistakable). We lodge within a "chronotope", a "time-space" which not only determines the forces at work in our culture, and the horizons and perspectives of perception and recognition whereby we organize our conscious existence, but gives to every speech act its singular historicity, determining the possible resonances and oscillations of meaning within certain bounds of time and place. Here Bakhtin is close to Wittgenstein's postulate that a particular "mythology" animates every distinct language and every historical phase in a language.

In turn, these axioms of "otherness" and of "chronotopy" underlie Bakhtin's central term, "heteroglossia", *raznoverchiye*, *raznoverchiye*. Social, historical, physiological, even meteorological conditions ensure that any work spoken (written) in any given time and place will have meanings different, to a greater or lesser degree, from the meaning(s) it would have if and when spoken in any other psychical context and tongue. The "heteroglossia" of all human utterances entails that the interpreter of a text who, inevitably, operates under conditions other than those of the original enunciation, can never fully recapture, can never fully analyse, the primal core, the "meaning of meaning", in any semantic moment. He can never, for instance, fully assess the decisive interplay (dialectic) between what Bakhtin identifies as the centripetal and the centrifugal agencies in any language and culture, ie, the interplay between rules and conventions on the one hand, and the innovative, "idiocentric", subversive, anarchic uses of the language by an individual, "heteroglossia", a concept even more radical than the Sapir-Whorf model of irreducibly autonomous "language-

worlds", makes impossible any strict delimitation between *langue* and *parole* as Saussure defines them. It denies the erosive and abstractive universalism of current transformational generative speech models. Bakhtin stands massively with Blake's "holiness of the minute particular".

In a psychic and social reality dominated by "heteroglossia", by *problema del parlante* (cf. the Italian version of Bakhtin's previously untranslated notes for 1970-71 in *Intesezioni*, 1.1.1981), the primary epistemological and executive mode is *dialogism*. Every oral pronouncement, every written text, is part of an ambient whole. There presses upon it the aggregate of other potential meanings, idioms, social and cultural forces, even of other languages. Bakhtin's notion here is very much that of the astrophysicist when the latter tells us that there is a strict sense in which the lives and motions of any particle in the universe are subject to the gravitational pull of all other matter. Another way of putting it (as I have sought to show in *After Babel*), is that no formally complete or mechanical translation is ever possible precisely because the relevant context and zone of interference is, potentially, infinite. To "dialogize", to speak, to write, to read "dialogically", teaches Bakhtin, is to apprehend the relative, the open-ended nature of all semantic phenomena. It is to realize that, with men and women, social classes, professions, age groups, localities, will use the very "same" words in the language to mean very different things. Bakhtin's *slow* emphasizes both the individuality of a word and the "dialogic" quality of its uses by an individual.

"Polyglossia", the co-existence of two or more national languages in such societies as ancient Rome or modern Finland is, for Bakhtin, merely a salient instance of the existential pluralities within any single tongue. And it is just this plurality which makes speech *vykazivaniye* - a living dialectical synthesis between individual consciousness and external, social determinants; between psychic uniqueness and communal generality.

These categories and definitions underwrite Bakhtin's masterpiece, his study of the carnival of language and of the language of carnival in Rabelais. Never has there been a style more "heteroglossic" than Rabelais's, more

carnally grounded, both in the human body and in the actualities of a teaming social milieu. Never has individual parlance been subject to more liberally observed and transmitted pressures, those of the cardinal linguistic context which is our own flesh. Thus every instant of the Gargantua-Pantagruel language-feast is "dialogic". An anarchic profusion of neologisms, the jargons of different social classes, of different trades, put to ludicrous rout the "monologic" pretensions of the high style of classical rhetoric. They make a mockery of mandarin prescription and academic norms of "correctness". In Bakhtin's Rabelais, even more than in his beloved Aristophanes, grammar becomes laughter in action. And laughter is, finally, the supreme truth and the supreme custodian of human freedom.

This is the crux of Bakhtin's entire aesthetics. Only laughter can attain "national universality". It alone can unify culture and community, because it is accessible to all. In an acute aphorism, set down towards the close of his life, Bakhtin defines laughter as "the realm of ends (the means, on the contrary, are always serious)". Only where laughter reigns, can the barriers of monadic apartness which separate human speakers be breached. Through this breach pours "festive culture" and the communion of carnival. It is via laughter and carnival that we can "make the world speak and give ear to its speech". In his 1970-71 notes, Bakhtin rightly ascribes this key trope to Heidegger. When, one wonders, did he come across Heidegger's ontological linguistics? How much of the relevant material was available to Bakhtin?

The Dostoevsky study is less of a whole. Here, Bakhtin is concerned primarily with two concepts: that of "polyphony" and that of "stratification". He sees in Dostoevsky's career and in his novels a striking case of the writer as "many-voiced". Dostoevsky's register comprises the modes of the journalist, of the melodramatist, of the autobiographer, of the philosopher, of the theologian, of the polemic publicist, of the public orator and, at times, of a labyrinthine allegorist who knows how to conceal the iconoclastic menace of his psychological and social insights. Correspondingly, the languages of Dostoevsky range all the way from Church Slavonic and Gogolian

irony to yellow journalism. For their part, the novels enact the dynamics of manifold styles or "stratification". Each character must seek a linguistic level or "stratum" appropriate to his or her psychic needs, to his or her - characteristically Dostoevskian - search for inward coherence and expressive identity. Entrapped in cliché or official idiom, in bourgeois banality or "poetic" eloquence, a human being literally loses itself. The spirit comes home to its place of true being (again an arch-Heideggerian notion) only when it hammers out its integral voice. In *Crime and Punishment*, Raskolnikov is hunted through successive and spurious speech-worlds - "Napoleonic", "positivist-scientific", "legalistic" and only rhetorically introspective - before he attains the stratum of liturgical yet also literal directness which restores him to himself and to the community of forgiveness.

The four essays in *The Dialogic Imagination* expound and elaborate Bakhtin's nomenclature and theoretical model with reference to prose fiction as a whole. They proclaim the view that the novel is the supreme literary and epistemological genre, that in the novel all previous major genres, the epic in particular, find their natural fulfilment. Only in the novel can the inherently "heteroglossic" and "dialogic" genius of natural language be freely deployed. Only here can various types of "dominant discourse", this is to say of antique rhetoric now sclerotic and oppressive, be undermined and, at last, swept away (though *Literature and Revolution* plunges for drama as the form of the radical future, there are distinct points of contact between Trotsky's and Bakhtin's critiques of past rhetorical elevation).

To experience language and the world in free, creative interplay is, for Bakhtin, to do so "novelistically". It is the prose novel - Bakhtin's formulation is striking - which makes of human discourse "a working hypothesis for comprehending and expressing reality". The traditional stylistics of the lyric-epic-tragic past had no means of handling the "dialogic" encounters between speech-levels, between diverse languages, between inner and outer discourse in the individual, between the grammars of different historical epochs and ideologies, which compose the mosaic of our actual world. Only the novel can "organize into

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artistic unity" the creative manifold of Habel. In tragic drama and the formulaic epic, words are frozen in hieratic place by "monologic" criteria of propriety and exclusion. But meaningful words, for modern man assuredly, are "born in dialogue as a living rejoinder within it; the word is shaped in dialogic interaction with an alien word that is already in the object." This birth, this coming to dialectical life, is best seen in the novel, with its "dialogic" and "stratified" fabric. And where the narrative design is strong enough, where it is open to self-parody and the feasts of laughter, the "heteroglossia", the "polyphony" of human consciousness and utterance are given the cohesion of living forms, of the life-process itself (Bakhtin knew his Bergson).

Bakhtin was a master comparatist, in Auerbach's sense, in that of Curtius and Gianfranco Contini. He draws on ancient grammarians and rhetoricians (Varro is a favourite). He is at home in Hellenistic romances, medieval *fabliaux*, the novels of the Baroque and the Enlightenment. He proceeds at a stroke from Ion of Chios and Macrobius to Herder, Pushkin and Eugene Sue. Ponderous, repetitive, often abstract as these essays are, laboured as we may find concepts such as "chronotopy", "heteroglossia" and "stratification", to be, Bakhtin's zealous wealth of allusion gives in many a passage something of the multicoloured, carnevalesque aura which he looks for in great literature.

But although the range of reference is exhilarating, there are drastic lacunae, particularly in respect of exactly those twentieth-century masters of fiction who would be decisive to Bakhtin's arguments. There are, in this thick tome, no references whatever to either Joyce or Kafka. There are two perfunctory mentions of Thomas Mann, there is one single allusion to Proust. It is, naturally, difficult to guess whether these omissions are the simple result of Soviet circumstance, of the fact that the writings of Joyce and of Kafka were obtainable, if at all, only in clandestine guise and obviously unmentionable. The case of Mann is more puzzling: much of Bakhtin's work on the relations between the epic and the novel is conceived in implicit challenge to Lukács, and in Lukács, Thomas Mann's presence is pervasive. But whatever the reasons, the resulting imbalance, especially where Bakhtin is dealing with time in the novel, is damaging.

Moreover, (and this crucial point goes unnoticed in Michael Holquist's largely uncritical introduction), Bakhtin's sense of "the prose novel" is, at all points, highly selective. What he means by "the novel" is, essentially and repetitively, the annals of Hellenistic romance, philosophic satire such as Lucian's and the works of Rabelais, Cervantes, Grimmelshausen, Sterne, Jean-Paul and Gogol. Dostoevsky serves, as we have seen, primarily as exemplar of the "polyphonic". In these essays, Balzac, Flaubert, George Eliot are present only marginally, where at all. The "great Russian novel" is *Eugene Onegin*. Aristophanes, the author of *Menippaeus*, the Menippean satirists are, by need and courtesy of Bakhtin's case, pre-novels.

Concomitantly, many of his judgments on men and on texts outside the "heteroglossic" and satirical canon are often bizarre. What justifies the designation of Ibsen's dramas as "novelized"? To assert that Calvin's language "was an intentional and conscious lowering of, almost a travesty on, the sacred language of the Bible," comes pretty close to talking nonsense. It is patently untrue that "poetic style is by convention suspended from any mutual interaction with alien discourse, any allusion to alien discourse". Unlike Mandelstam, it would seem that Bakhtin had understood little of Dante.

But this last point leads to the heart of the trouble. When Bakhtin declares, as he does in these four papers, that only prose fiction can deal with the dynamic, many-voiced, self-subverting, always open-ended flux of life, when he declares that a phenomenon such as "Bovarianism" – the obsessive identification of our own lives with those of fictive personae – is made possible only by the "modern" (i.e. post-Renaissance) novel, he is leaving out the world of drama, of Shakespeare above all. There is hardly

an aspect of "heteroglossia", of "stratification", of "dialogic" spontaneity, of parodistic plurality, which is not magnificently present in, say, the two Parts of *Henry IV*. The provocative intrusion of visceral, below-stairs speech into sublimity is at least as old as Aeschylus' *Libation Bearers* and Euripides' *Electra*. There is no more morally open-ended, no more intellectually questioning and self-questioning a form, than Greek tragic drama. And long before Madame Bovary, generations identified with Hamlet.

Now Bakhtin was far too acute not to know all this. Thus it seems plausible that the somewhat monolithic and arbitrary tenor of argument exhibited in these four essays is not representative of the subtlety and lucidity of his thought. The emphasis on the utter primacy of prose fiction, on its unique epistemological merits, as set out here and as made even more emphatic by Professor Holquist's commentary, may well be misleading. It could stand for one of Bakhtin's several voices or "masks".

Marxist literary criticism, the epistemology of Marxist aesthetics, have, since the time of Marx, Engels, Plekhanov and the young Lukács, drawn mainly on prose fiction. It is in the domain of the novel – Eugene Onegin being, typologically, considered as such – that Russian and Soviet literary theory and practical criticism have played their strongest suit. Once Formalist poetics had been hounded from native ground, the theory of literature, so far as it was allowed in the Stalinist and post-Stalinist dispensations, was, largely, that of the novel. In exalting the polyphonic, irreverent, populist genius of Gargantua, of Uncle Toby, of Bancho Panza and Simplicissimus, Bakhtin was staying, outwardly, within the rules of the Soviet game. But he was, of course, going much deeper. He was celebrating the very freedoms denied to man in the Soviet Union. "Heteroglossia", "polyphony", the rejection of the "monologic" and "frozen" in human discourse – these are audaciously Aesopian terms of rebellion against the conditions of Bakhtin's existence and of a totalitarian community.

Thus the study, the seeming exaltation of the novel, are weapons in the more or less masked struggle which Bakhtin's sensibility and scholarship sustained against the state. He could not have endured, one suspects, had he tried to fight his battles on the exposed ground of a theory of lyric poetry or of drama. As in all important writing out of the Soviet ice-age, we must learn to read between the lines even where (especially where) Bakhtin's propositions seem most dogmatic. His arsenal was richer than that displayed in these four essays. Listened to closely, the "dialogic imagination" will exclude neither Shakespeare nor Molière.

A third edition (and the first in paperback) of Victor Erlich's valuable and impartial study of *Russian Formalism, History – Doctrine* has just been published (311pp. Yale University Press, £5.65, 0 300 02635 8). Professor Erlich has written a new preface to this edition, but has not updated the text nor the bibliography.

## Passing

At seventy, my father's life  
Instructs me: one lung  
Gone, the other – less than itself –  
Still gasps with asthma.  
There is no end to the end

Which goes on. It is  
My own slow death. Like him  
I vanish while my two sons  
Hug me here, not understanding  
Why they do, until

There is nothing between us –  
Only, in photographs,  
My living atoms around them  
As I slip invisibly  
From their.

John Mole



"Le Tennis", an 1890 wood engraving by Lucien Pissarro. The original block is among those now in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford. A limited edition of 175 copies has been made from twenty-nine of these blocks by Iain Bain and David Chambers, working on an Albion hand press of the sort the Pissarro used. The portfolio is available at £160 plus VAT from the Anthony d'Offay Gallery, 9 Dering Street, New Bond Street, London W1, and comes with a forty-seven page catalogue by David Chambers. This attractive book, fully illustrated with all the blocks in the portfolio and a number of the original drawings, can be purchased separately for £35 plus 75p post and package, either from Anthony d'Offay or from the Publications Department, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.

## The intuitive side

By Peter Lomas

LOUIS BREGER:  
*Freud's Unfinished Journey*  
Conventional and Critical Perspectives  
in Psychoanalytic Theory  
143pp. Routledge and Kegan Paul.  
£8.50.  
0 7100 0613 6

It is by means of the intellect that we have tried to come to grips with human experience. That is to say, we have relied, following Bacon and Descartes, on cognition, abstraction and the principles which inform modern science in our public statements on the nature of man. In private we rely more on intuition. Our first experience of life – that which forms the core of our being – comes, if we are fortunate, from the intuitions of a mother. This discrepancy between the public and private attitude towards experience is acutely revealed in our understanding and treatment of the disturbed in mind. Whereas we usually respond to a distressed and perplexed person intuitively in private, our approach changes to a "scientific" one as soon as his or her disturbance is publicly identified.

At the end of the last century, when the intuitive approach to the mentally ill was at its lowest ebb, Freud, trained in the medical-scientific tradition, emerged with a new formula. Insofar as it was a formula, expressed in as

scientific a language as he could muster, he stood firmly with the traditional adherence to objectivity. To this extent he was a conservative. But his actual mode of approach to those in trouble, and the findings which resulted from this approach, were radically opposed to the form in which he strained to state them.

In *Freud's Unfinished Journey* Louis Breger, an American psychologist and psychoanalyst, describes the ways in which this central dilemma pervades Freud's work and is never resolved. Breger contrasts Freud's "masculine" ideal of order, discipline, work, science, and the conquest of nature with the "feminine" receptivity of his practice with patients, the recognition of the child's need for love and care, and his awareness of the disastrous consequences of a divisive rather than holistic world-view. Only late in life, in *Civilization and its Discontents* did Freud come near to recognizing the philosophical and social implications of his discoveries.

That Freud was in some ways a man of his time, steeped in male prejudice, couching his insights in an inappropriate and unworthy framework, is hardly fresh news. Many writers have made the same point, although few can have made it with the economy and lucidity of this book. What, however, is particularly rewarding in Breger's treatment of this issue is his reworking of Freud's case-histories in the light of his critique, thereby showing the degree to which the conflict permeates Freud's notions of psychopathology. Breger gives most space to the famous case of Schreber, and I shall do the same.

Schreber was a prominent German judge who, at the age of fifty-one suffered a severe psychosis and entered a mental hospital under the care of a Dr Flechsig. After his discharge he wrote his "Memoirs of my Mental Illness" in an effort to convey what he believed to be an important insight. In his book Schreber describes how he came to believe that he was subjected to the most terrible persecutions, firstly by Flechsig and then by God, whose rays penetrated his body causing intense pain and restriction. He became unable to walk, eat, sleep or perform any action freely. If, however, he could be transformed into a woman, then, he believed, God's rays would bring pleasure and the world would be set back in its proper place.

Freud was the first to subject this extraordinarily rich document to analysis. In his view Schreber transferred homosexual wishes which he had unconsciously directed towards his father onto Flechsig and God. These impulses were now in the open and they terrified him and were totally

unacceptable. Therefore he denied their existence and maintained that, far from loving his father, he hated him and was hated and persecuted by him. It is of significance that Freud believed Schreber's father to have been a benign man likely to have inspired love in his son.

Since Freud's analysis striking evidence of Schreber's upbringing by his father has emerged thanks to the diligence of an American psychoanalyst, William Niederland, Niederland discovered that Schreber's father, an influential physician and educator, held and practised horrifying methods of child-rearing to a degree that could only be described as persecutory. All kind of mechanical devices were used to constrict the child's movement, and a similar, punitive control was exerted upon his mind. Indeed, as Morton Schatzman shows in his book on the subject, *Soul Murder*, the actual bodily restrictions advocated by the father closely corresponded to the persecutions suffered by the son during the course of his psychosis.

Breger's thesis is that Freud's masculine bias prevented him from seeing the real origin of Schreber's fear of his sexual impulses. Schreber suffers from his culture's distorted view of femininity and autonomy as this view was transmitted to him through his father's beliefs and methods. What breaks through when Schreber becomes psychotic is, thus, the denied and repressed side of his humanity: femininity, softness, the desire to feel some comfort and pleasure in his body, and his long-repressed willfulness or autonomy.

Freud, although not "a Gestapo-parent" like Schreber's father, shared his general view of instinct, sexuality and autonomy to an extent that led him "to attribute conflict in the father-son relationship to the son's impulses, rather than the father's actions", and to fail to understand that in his "Memoirs" Schreber is struggling to "tell the world something about love, masculinity, and femininity; about discipline and child abuse".

Although Freud's adherence to science and his depreciation of women can be seen as different aspects of his general philosophy of living, there is, I think, some use in treating them separately. Whereas his masculine bias can now be clearly seen and is not too difficult to combat, it is less easy, in a scientific age, to give more public acknowledgement to the feminine principle of intuition that is the basis of his work – and, indeed, of all psychotherapeutic endeavour. This, says Breger, is the journey that we must finish for Freud.

## The malaise of modernity

By David Gascoyne

C. A. HACKETT:

*Rimbaud*  
A Critical Introduction  
167pp. Cambridge University Press.  
£17.50 (paperback, £5.95).  
0 521 22976 6

C. A. Hackett's "Critical Introduction" to Rimbaud, the most radically innovative of nineteenth-century French poets, is a judiciously condensed and balanced monograph free of academic aridity and conveying an invigorating feeling of enthusiasm.

Professor Hackett's text itself runs to only 131 pages, being followed by very adequate translations, by the author, of the numerous, often full-length, quotations from Rimbaud's *oeuvre* that are embedded in the exposition, and by a meticulously composed Chronological Table showing the years and dates of Rimbaud's epoch, life and works, with alongside them a list of the historical and literary events that marked each of these years. Such tables can be valuable, being often full of surprises and suggestions, and the present instance is in this respect, for me, no exception; it reinforces, in fact, my belief in the fundamental credibility of the Jungian concept of "synchronicity". In the third chapter of the book, for instance, attention is directed to the fact that in 1870, a year before Rimbaud wrote his manifesto-like so-called "Lettre du Voyant",

Isidore Ducasse, alias the Comte de Lautréamont, published his misleadingly entitled *Poésies*, generally presumed to have been intended to serve as preface to a collection of poems that were never written, which also might well be described as having something of the character of a manifesto. Although Lautréamont, eight years older than his even more precocious near-contemporary, cannot possibly have had any inkling of Rimbaud's existence, how fervently, having himself announced that at that time "des frissons nouveaux parcourent l'atmosphère intellectuelle", he would have found himself concurring with Rimbaud's assertion that: "il faut être absolument moderne".

The Chronological Table is followed by a couple of pages of Select Bibliography, which strike me as being a little meagre. Most of the standard, currently available editions of Rimbaud's work are listed, though one of the most recent and probably least expensive, the *Poésies*, also containing *Derniers vers*, *Une saison en enfer* and *Illuminations*, most capably edited and introduced by Daniel Leuwers, to be found in the popular *Le Livre de Poche* series, is not among them. Although it must be most rare and difficult to find

nowadays, Edgell Rickword's study of Rimbaud surely merits a mention also. On the other hand, I am grateful to Professor Hackett for the information, to be found in his Chronological Table, that it was apparently George Moore who first brought the name of Rimbaud before a public of English readers, and in the same year as that of the poet's ghostly death in Marseilles (1891) at that, in an essay on "Two Unknown Poets" (the other being Laforgue) in his *Impressions and Opinions*.

As one who read Benjamin Fondane's *Rimbaud le Voyant* about a year after its first appearance (1933) with the exhilarating feeling of having for the first time discovered an author who had seen Rimbaud vividly in just such a light as that towards which I was myself then groping, I am unable to resist expressing pleasure at finding the writer of this new English Introduction to the subject of my chief obsession of those years quoting from Fondane with tacit approval, even though Editions Plasma's 1979 republication of the book (containing five hitherto unpublished short chapters) does not find a place in his Bibliography. This is, however, perfectly understandable, as Fondane's study, though it may be considered to have stated the whole Rimbaud "case" in fundamentally radical and hence disturbingly metaphorical terms, expresses an extremely individual point of view, and as such might well be found by many to be too polemic.

Perhaps the most admirable quality of Fondane's philosophico-critical writings in general is the rare, disciplined passion with which they are informed; whereas Professor Hackett has quite clearly made a considerable effort to treat his theme here as dispassionately as possible. He emerges as a Rimbaudian who has noticeably reacted against what he appears to regard, and not without justification, as the exaggerated *seer* aspect of the poet's writings that in France was for many years invariably associated with Rimbaud's name. I suspect that he associates this type of exaggeration above all with the Surrealists, though it was in fact a group of "dissident" one-time Surrealists, notably Roland de Réneville and R. Gilbert-Lecomte, co-founders with René Daumal of the review *Le Grand Jeu*, that contained the principal spokesmen of what might be described as the "Rimbaud le Voyant" cult. In the first *Manifeste Surréaliste* (1924), André Breton restricted himself to stating that "Rimbaud est surréaliste dans la vie et ailleurs".

It is here that we touch on the crux of any possible debate concerning Rimbaud's basic significance today, more than a century since his final "literary" words were penned: the inseparability of the extraordinarily haunting though

brief and seemingly abandoned work from the unique personality of its author and his dramatic and indeed tormented life. The famous, ever-renewed conflict between two schools of criticism – the one which believes that a poet's or novelist's work should only be judged with supposedly absolute objectivity on its own distinctive merits or flaws, without allowing the intrusion of any evidence other than the minimum of stark biographical fact, and the other, which regards the artist's written work as but one manifestation in an entire existential continuum – here makes an unavoidable intrusion. In presenting these two overtly irreconcilable types of critical approach in such terms, I have no doubt betrayed on which side my own sympathy lies; yet it is to Professor Hackett's credit that he shows no obvious signs of favouring one of these approaches as opposed to the other – indeed, if anything the tinge of asperity in his brief reference to the type of analysis long favoured by the group of critics associated until quite recently with *Tel Quel* and structuralism (personally I would not include Michel Butor in any such overall derogation), gives one ground for supposing him rather to favour the biographically illuminated autopsy.

Despite this, however, the greater part of *Rimbaud: A Critical Introduction* is devoted to exegesis and a lucidly undogmatic scrutiny of Rimbaud's most significant writings. Among his glosses to the prose poems of *Illuminations* (whether or not Rimbaud ever intended the definite article to precede the title of this collection is debatable, since he had no responsibility for its compilation or publication), Professor Hackett is surely right in singling out "Génie" as representing one of the finest examples of what he regards as Rimbaud's special gift, his art of persuasion, which is "not concerned to convince us of the existence or importance of something real; but to persuade himself and the reader that the non-existent does exist and to create the illusion of its real presence." This would seem to be debatable at least on ontological grounds, but it would be difficult to quarrel with the statement that in "Génie" Rimbaud, "in a continually modulating and flawless rhetorical sweep . . . brings together the facets that have occurred separately in other *Illuminations*, such as 'Vies', 'Angoisse', 'Solde' (the obverse and cynical counterpart of 'Génie'), 'Jeunesse (Sonnet)' and, in particular 'A une raison'. The judgment with which the chapter specially devoted to *Illuminations* concludes is concise and unexceptionable: "The *Illuminations* are (Rimbaud's) greatest achievements and they are the climax of a poetic and human drama to which *Une saison en enfer* is the dénouement." The peroration that winds up the

next chapter, concerning the work in which this dénouement found its expression, is unexceptionable principally in the sense that it is surely accurate, but to me it seems to lack just that degree of emphasis that could have made what it says a more satisfactory comment on Rimbaud's disillusioned valediction to literary self-expression, to his attempt to make language the vehicle of an exceptional vision and to all the prevailing criteria of the nineteenth century. In his journey of self-discovery, Professor Hackett tells us, "Rimbaud has touched on, and laid bare, most of the conflicts, ambivalent emotions, and dualisms that exist in Western man. Now, at a distance of more than a century, we can see that, if at one level *Une saison en enfer* expresses the crisis in the life of an adolescent struggling for self-fulfilment in the year 1873, at another level it represents a crisis in our own materialistic civilization."

When considered in the integral context of his life – including the persistently enigmatic vicissitudes of the existence on which he embarked, ceasing to write anything but inexpressive family and business letters and geographical reports, at the age of nineteen, together with his buffingly hermetic, at first sight far from sympathetic character and the few limited, unsatisfactory yet significant relationships that intermittently alleviated his essential solitude – Rimbaud appears as one of the most typical exemplars of the malaise most symptomatic of the ever more disruptive crisis of the modern world and its whole civilization. It is fairly obvious that our own universal "season in hell" has come. Heidegger, lecturing on "The Thing" in 1950, spoke of exactly what seems to be happening now: "Man stands at what the explosion of the atom bomb could bring with it. He does not see that the atom bomb and its explosion are the mere final emission

of what has long since taken place, has already happened. Not to mention the single hydrogen bomb, whose triggering, thought through to its utmost potential, might be enough to snuff out all life on earth."

Here, no doubt, it will be asked what these seemingly irrelevant, scare-mongering quotations can have to do with the study of Arthur Rimbaud. I have introduced them because, despite my earlier remarks regarding the tendency to exaggerate the importance of the "Lettre du Voyant" as a document outlining the one true future path of modern poetry, these were not meant to imply that I fail to recognize, through Rimbaud's later writings, continual, obviously authentic flashes of prophetic inspiration. And it was because he experienced so disturbing a premonition of the sort of mistrust, madness and demonic dumbness of which Martin Buber has written that he became incapable of pursuing his youthful campaign on behalf of *voyance* and the conquest of the irrational; while the kind of dissociation of the personality that led him to declare "Je suis un autre" can be seen as closely related to the ethically bankrupt detachment that causes us to "stare" impotently at the bomb and the present nuclear arms-race.

A final quotation from Rimbaud himself, though it is scarcely reassuring, may serve to justify the way I have ended a review of an uncontroversial book about the poet. It is not its flawless rhetoric which makes it remarkable; and it comes from the end of the prose-poem in *Illuminations* entitled "Démocratie":

"Au revoir ici, n'importe où. Conscrits du bon vouloir, nous aurons la philosophie féroce; ignorants pour la science, nous pourrions le contour; la crevasse pour le monde qui va. C'est la vraie marche. En avant, route!"

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George MacBeth

October brought the last one of the year  
And laid it sleeping on your window-frame.  
It stood for winter, and the falling game,  
The end of something, and death coming near.

Drowned in a jug, with cardboard slid across  
To keep it under, it sleeps always now,  
Its warrior's head bent sideways, like a bow  
Made to an enemy, for the mortal loss.

I see its body, simple as a cone  
Of pine or Douglas fir, cypress or spruce.  
It has no meaning, scarcely any use  
Except to make more precious all we own.

The last of life, and living in this place,  
Year in, year out, with what we have and hold,  
Great barns, and trees, and somewhere to grow cold  
And die in, when the time comes, with some grace

In folded honour, free from bitterness  
Or rancour, and not losing elegance  
At the last, as this dead hornet's final chance  
Left it a scoop of terror. That, O yes.







# The Queensberrys and their rules

By Terence De Vere White

BRIAN ROBERTS:

*The Mad Bad Line*  
The Family of Lord Alfred Douglas  
319pp. Hamish Hamilton, £15.  
0 241 10637 0

To have written about the Zulu kings was a useful preparation for a book about Lord Alfred Douglas and his supremely dotty family. "The mad bad line", taken by Brian Roberts for his title, is a quotation from one of the home-truth letters Wilde was prone to write to his nasty friend in their times of trouble.

The hero of this book of franks is the seventh Marquess of Queensberry, Lord Alfred's father. He is remembered for two reasons, as Wilde's deadly enemy and as the inventor of the rules which govern boxing - rules which in life he conspicuously ignored, hitting below the belt whenever opportunity offered. The rules were in fact the work of someone else, a friend of Cambridge days. In comparison with the sully sonneteer, his son, the Marquess was almost tolerable. Lord Alfred was a dandy character, a snake where his father was a tame elephant whose immediate reaction when crossed was to charge head down at anyone in sight. When the Marquess appeared there was nothing to be done but send for the police - as Lord Rosebery discovered, when Queensberry followed him to Hamburg to continue a feud that had begun when Rosebery recommended Queensberry's eldest son Francis to Gladstone for an English peerage (as Viscount Drumlanrig) he was not qualified to sit in the House of Lords). Queensberry was all delighted acquiescence at first, but as his way, changed tack abruptly, without warning, and bombarded Rosebery, Gladstone and even the Queen with abusive letters.

The Rosebery connection ceased to trouble when Drumlanrig, having got himself engaged to be married, decided to kill himself with a shot gun, emulating his sporting grandfather who had died in the same way. That was in October 1894. On the first day of April of the same year Queensberry had written to his younger son Alfred threatening to disown him and cut off supplies if his "intimacy with this man Wilde" didn't cease forthwith.

Queensberry could now concentrate on Alfred, whose worst grievance against his father was the fact that he had sent him to Winchester. Lord Alfred contended that a divorced atheist, whose second marriage to a girl under age had been annulled, was in no position to play the role of outraged parent. But Wilde was so blatant in his conduct that Queensberry's anxiety was understandable in worldly terms. These troubles with his boys reminded him of his maternal grandfather Alfred Montgomery, whom he particularly disliked. A handsome Irish adventurer who brought good looks into the family, Montgomery had been taken up by the Marquess of Wellesley, the Viceroy, and appointed his secretary at the age of sixteen. Charitable tongues said they were father and son.

Queensberry's appearance and manner of dress (suitable for a jockey) did not help him on solemn or tragic occasions. He was, when most serious, a figure of fun. He found his perfect setting at the Globe Theatre in 1882 where Tennyson's first play in prose and last to be performed was presented to an unwilling public. *The Promise of May* expressed the Laureate's aversion to the progressive spirit of the age. There was hissing on the first night when the villain, an archetypal progressive, spoke in character at enormous length. Queensberry turned up on the third night and delivered a speech of protest during the first act at Tennyson's caricature of the contemporary freethinker. There was an uproar in the theatre before the play was allowed to continue. In the interval Queensberry spoke again and was eventually removed struggling from the theatre.

He revelled in the subsequent publicity, as president of the British Secular Union he was given an opportunity

to air in the press his ideas about marriage and divorce, ideas which seem perfectly reasonable today. But even allowing for the prevailing ethos, Queensberry never commanded attention as other prominent freethinkers of the time did. Perhaps as Mr Roberts suggests, he never fully understood his own theories. He had had a revelation when, as a young man, he had gone to look for the body of his brother Francis who had been killed in a controversial attempt to climb the Matterhorn in 1865. It was on the basis of this revelation that he had progressed to his position as president of the Secular Union.

Florence, Queensberry's youngest sister, who had been brought up a Roman Catholic, came to share his secularist opinions, but she was more intelligent. In her the family's twin inheritance was most pronounced: she had the menfolk's enthusiasm for horses and their wives' humane impulses. The Dowager Lady Queensberry had created a stir when her O'Donnell blood was quickened in 1867 by the fate of the "Manchester Martyrs". In a raid on a police van to rescue Fenian prisoners a policeman was shot and three of the rescue party were sentenced to death in consequence. Lady Queensberry sent a donation to the men for the relief of their families.

Florence too was to interest herself in Ireland, but she had her brother's knack of antagonizing the parties she assisted as much as the ones she opposed. She began her public career by writing an account of a strange adventure in Patagonia. After that she persuaded the *Morning Post* to employ her as war correspondent in South Africa. Peace had been made when she arrived in Cape Town in 1881. That did not deter her. Having eavesdropped on the proceedings of the Transvaal Royal Commission at Government House, she became bored and decided instead to espouse the Zulu cause. It had great merit: it annoyed the Boers whom she hated. Back in London she made trouble by sending a letter to the press from the Zulu king into which she had inserted a paragraph by another hand to strengthen the argument.

She became in due course a champion of women's freedom, a member of the Rational Dress Society, a vegetarian. She was an admirable person, but the family's manic desire for self-advertisement undid her. One gets the impression of flight and pursuit in her efforts to entangle herself in African and Irish affairs. No one took her seriously. She was indirectly responsible for the death of Queen Victoria's beloved John Brown. The Queen sent him to investigate an extraordinary account put out by Florence of having been attacked by two Irishmen dressed up as women, in a wood at Windsor. John Brown could find no footprints in the mud, and caught the cold that killed him.

Florence was inclined to tipple. It was one of the few interests she shared with her husband, Sir Alexander Beaumont Dixie. They were known to some of their friends as Sir Always and Lady Sometimes Tippy.

Of the remaining siblings, Gertrude, the eldest, entered a convent when she had been crossed in love, but she came out finally after two attempts and, inevitably, started to write novels. But

*Brown as a Berry* in two volumes did not find a public, and she was pleased to answer her priest brother Archibald's call for a housekeeper for the home for Catholic boys he presided over in Paddington. He left her in charge while he went to Canada, and returned to find Gertrude at thirty-six married to Thomas Stock, the boy who looked after the bakery on which the home's income depended. He was sixteen when Gertrude met him.

Jim, the remaining brother, lived in the shadow of his sister Florence. He drank heavily and took to novel-writing after he married. His manner of filling in a census form raised doubts about his sanity; he had to be looked for, and when discovered he had cut his throat.

Mr Roberts has no new light to shed on the Bosie/Wilde imbroglio but he gives an arresting account of Bosie in retirement. He had married and separated from his wife; his son was in a mental home. Having formally re-

nounced homosexuality, he had taken a vow of celibacy and become a Roman Catholic. The Dowager, who had always spoiled him, changed her faith in order to give him support. They lived together, on and off, until she died in 1935.

Bosie tried hard to be nice to visitors after all those years of vindictive litigation, largely motivated by a desire for a better place than Robert Ross in the Wilde story. If he liked you he was prepared to discuss what Wilde and he "did". Not everyone realized that the old man saw himself as another Goethe in Weimar. All hell broke loose when Yeats left him out of the *Oxford Book of Modern Verse*. Douglas sent an open telegram to all the serious newspapers. "The attitude of a minor poet to a major one", he explained. "Had Thomas Moore been editing such a book, he would have omitted Keats and Shelley." He died in 1945.

The manner throughout this book is vigorous, favouring cliché; words are not always used according to their precise meaning. But the final result is lively entertainment.

## To do with books

By Nigel Cross

ROY STOKES:

*Michael Sadleir 1888-1957*  
Scarcecrow Press, 52 Liberty Street,  
Metuchen, New Jersey. \$8.50.  
0 8018 1292 4

Michael Sadleir liked to describe himself as a bookman and few people can have had more to do with books since Caxton; he was a novelist, essayist, critic, biographer, bibliographer, book-collector, and director and chairman of the Constable publishing house. He was steeped in nineteenth-century literary and social history, so much so that it is difficult to believe that he died as recently as 1957. In his imagination he was a Victorian in the Mayhem mould: fascinated, even mildly thrilled by the sordid, erotic London sub-culture of the nineteenth century. His novels, otherwise turgid affairs, were popular for their meticulous descriptions of the "gaping calico bodices" of Victorian prostitutes and the rent dresses - "from the shoulder blades to the waist" - of abused servant-girls. In the 1940s this sort of thing was strong enough to sell 150,000 copies in hardback.

Sadleir's friends, however, "tactfully never mentioned his novels", and his biography that he achieved was of his reputation. His *Excursions in Victorian Bibliography* (1922) was the first attempt to map nineteenth-century literature with the same precision that Greg and Pollard had mapped the



Wilde's "Screaming Scarlet Marquess", the pugnacious Queensberry in later life - from the book reviewed here.

literature of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Realizing that major writers like Dickens and George Eliot would never be short of adequate bibliographies, Sadleir concentrated on minor nineteenth-century writers, most of whom he also happened to collect. He went on to publish biographies of Bulwer, Blessington and D'Ossy and Anthony Trollope - the last some years before its subject became the focus of what Sadleir disapprovingly called "Trollopian Studies". He crowned a lifetime's work on the nineteenth century with *XIX Century Fiction* (1951), a detailed and descriptive catalogue of his personal collection of first editions including writers as Lady Charlotte Bury and Lady Georgiana Chatterton - George Eliot's "silly lady novelists".

It was the infatuated collector in Sadleir that inspired the bibliographer: "When year after year I have visited him in his office," wrote Harold Nicolson, "I have observed an ever increasing array of Victorian yellow backs comment on this sad collection, even as no gentleman would exclaim aloud if he observed a hypodermic syringe upon the dressing table of a friend. This 'sad collection' went the way of most - to America. Over 10,000 volumes were bought by UCLA and the Trollope collection went to Princeton. It is appropriate, then, that the man who has given American scholars years of fun and miles of theses should be the subject of an anthology-cum-bibliography published in New Jersey and edited in British Columbia. For

Roy Stokes, it is clearly a labour of love. He gives much of the flavour of Sadleir's style and engaging pedantry through extracts from his books and essays, as well as a comprehensive checklist of his wide range of published work.

Among the pieces Professor Stokes has disinterred, it is worth quoting a some length from these perceptive and remarkably undated comments, from Sadleir's Dent Memorial lecture, on the practice of reviewing: "The sad truth is that book critics generally have consented to the debauching of their craft. Only a small extent can be attributed to economic causes; for literary criticism is very poorly paid. . . . It is to be feared that the changed status of the literary critic must mostly be ascribed to a desire for individual publicity, which is largely due to the fact that the modern reviewer is too often an author also and known as such. Instead of remote beings, proud of their critical activity and not themselves authors who do reviewing in their spare time, reviewers are nowadays literary names on sale to newspapers. For the sake of getting their individualities blazoned in the press and in columns of advertisements, they have surrendered the detachment which alone confers the right to criticize and have become, in flattery or in denigration, mere party men. Their influence has in consequence gone; and their place as public mentors has been taken by publishers, advertising of a blint and mass-suggestive kind.

## Fifty years on . . .

The TLS of July 16, 1931, reviewed Elizabeth Wordsworth's *Poems and Plays*, published by the Oxford University Press at 4s 6d:

Miss Wordsworth's memory covers a period of eighty years; she is a Victorian poetess. The volume of lyrical and dramatic verse which she now publishes contains meditations on the Franco-Prussian war, on the babyhood of Robert Hugh Benson (1873), on the early death of his brother Martin five years later, on the death of George Eliot, on Queen Victoria's first Jubilee, on "The Old Postage Stamp, with the head of Queen Victoria", and in all these and many others we find the sweetness, the substance, the security which were of the atmosphere of the time.

Farewell, dear face, which we have known Familiar as our mother's own: A million homes have felt the thrill Of thy sweet presence, mute and still.

O Royal head, O loving heart Whose kindness did to power impart A night beyond the might of force From motherhood's divinest source. O Empress, whose illustrious name

Has silenced envy, beggared fame, In history's page how bright appears The sum of thine unequalled years! In a charming introductory paragraph Miss Wordsworth dedicates her volume to those who in a world of change hold fast to the things that are changeless and enduring. Who knows if it is not part of the virtue of stormy times like these, that it increases their number and strengthens the determination and precision of their hold? If one were to criticize the sustains Miss Wordsworth's verse - and one has little inclination to criticize - it would be on the ground that with all its negligence and scornfulness, it is at grips with problems which its predecessors were unaware of. Many who thought themselves anchored were drifting with the stream in a comfortable boat; for the buoyancy of success affects even the most spiritually-minded in some degree. Yet Miss Wordsworth's poetry is at its best when it owes most to its epoch. The plays she wrote in

later years for performance by her students at Lady Margaret Hall will be read with pleasure chiefly by those who were originally most closely associated with them, though of course they are part of the history of the higher education of women, as all their author's life has been. Many of her lyrics, too, are best describable as good thoughts and pleasant patterns agreeably and tastefully combined. Her periods and her metres are most convincing when she celebrates her country, its beauty, its power, its high vocation:

England is everywhere! From East to West Her speech is echoed, and her face is known;

Strange destiny! enfolded in the breast Of men of olden time Who in her litful clime Worked out the laws, the thoughts that make the world their own.

or praises the good old days, when life was calm and contented as a summer's day:

The old outspoken days of healthy lives, When Being was from Seeming undivorced, And Taste was not assumed, nor Feeling forced.

PAUL FOOT:

*Red Shelley*  
293pp. Sidgwick and Jackson, £12.95.  
(paperback, £5.95).  
0 283 98679 4

From Leigh Hunt to Shaw, and again from Shaw to our own day, something has kept alive the feeling that the case for romanticism as a political movement depends on what we make of Shelley. The reason lies partly in the excellence of his disciples; but this in turn came from the purity of his example. He found his principles early, and allowed them to develop in ways not recommended by a timely wisdom. He brought in-exhaustible reserves of energy to the work of agitation and public defence; and throughout his life he refused to make disenchantment with a person or event the pretext for disenchantment with a cause. In a fine tribute, Marx is supposed to have called him "a thorough revolutionary" who "would have remained in the van of socialism all his life", in contrast with Byron, who "had he lived out his span, would undoubtedly have become a reactionary bourgeois". It now appears uncertain that Marx said this, as Paul Foot reluctantly concedes in *Red Shelley*. But if Marx did not say it, the person who did was for one moment his equal. Some fixed and inward resolve guarded Shelley's mind for ever against the spirit of reaction, and made him believe, with the tenacity of faith, that "There is a flux and reflux in the tide of human things which bears the shipwrecked hopes of men into a secure haven, after the storms are past." To those who honour a poet's politics only as politics, that sentence is more precious than all the fine talk of Byron's parliamentary debut, and all the grand showmanship of Cain.

Mr Foot's title gives a fair idea of his purpose and procedure. He comes to Shelley as a revolutionary socialist in quest of an ancestor; both by a new definition of Shelley's achievement, and a new frankness in exhibiting it, he aims to convince his readers that Shelley was essentially a political writer; having once recognized this, he thinks, they will be in a position to separate out the true prophet from the common dreamer who occasionally harboured common prejudices. But Foot offers them a great deal of assistance in drawing the line; and this raises a question about his intended audience. Who are they, that they should need, or welcome, this sort of assistance? "I want", writes Foot, "to pass on Shelley's political enthusiasms to today's socialists, radicals and feminists, in the hope that their commitment will be strengthened and enriched by Shelley, as mine has been."

The same time, he has tried "to take Shelley out of the academic prison in which he has been firmly trapped for half a century". These tasks require gifts more widely distinct from each other than Foot appears to realize. To make Shelley available to a larger audience, patience, vivid quotation, introductory and explanatory power. To unlock the academic prison, again patience, with some knowledge of the particular cell-block in question, and a map of the escape route likeliest to work. Carrying out, both tasks are worth attempting, and Foot's effort to unite them is the most appealing feature of his book.

To assure us of his fitness as a guide, Foot tells how he used to dismiss Shelley as the "fete and over-intimate author of a few enormous lyrics; he too, for a time, accepted the stereotype of "a beautiful and ineffectual angel"; until "Behind the other-worldly lyrics I had learned at school, I found poems which had inspired generations of workers to political action. I came face to face with Shelley's gigantic intellect, and was re-educated. He became for me like a great tree of knowledge and I like a squirrel, scampering down each undiscovered branch." One would like to have known Mr Foot at that stage. As we

see him in the book, he is sometimes reverential towards Shelley, but more often querulous with anyone who took a different line, and this wish to fight the old battles once more implies no great confidence in the man who fought them first. Indeed, his fondness for political action leads him to be far less just to Shelley's antagonists than Shelley ever was. Thus he says of one:

Two years after the French Revolution, Edmund Burke wrote a book, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, which defended property rights, kings, queens and noblemen against the "swinish multitude". It was a bestseller in the fashionable areas where people bought books.

These sentences contain a mistake, an anachronism, and a perhaps inadvertent slur. For what Burke actually wrote was, "learning will be cast into the mire, and trodden down under the hoofs of a swinish multitude". A, not the, swinish multitude; that is, a mob, which may be swinish, rather than the masses, who as we know are always swinish. The mistake was perpetuated in the working-class literature of the 1790s and 1800s, and served its purpose admirably as a debater's point against Burke. What reason can there be to repeat it in 1981? "Best-seller" is the anachronism, and by joining it with his reference to "fashionable areas", Foot manages to suggest that Burke sold himself to the middle and upper classes. This charge Burke answered in his "Letter to a Noble Lord" with an earnestness conclusive enough to silence the jeers of anyone who has read it.

Yet there are elsewhere, one feels that Foot may have been over-zealous in his crusade, as he is into crudeness simply by his headlong rush to inform us with pre-digested facts. His prose at its best is competent journalism, with a touch of the gossip-columnist's relish for bad motives. At its worst it is clumsily figurative, and without a trace of Shelley's mastery of the middle style. We are told of Castlereagh, for instance, with what degree of commiseration it is impossible to say. "The psychopathic introspection which led to his suicide was not far removed from the surface of his life." In another version of the same metaphor, Shelley was "politically isolated and his isolation ran through his writing like an open wound". By the later chapters, even the briefest descriptions have become the sport of caprice: Rousseau is "a tasteful philosopher", Keats "a radical in his spare time", Peacock, without much qualification, "the Tory Peacock". Foot's taste of style, however, is in keeping with his grasp of history.

Of the 1794 treason trials, he remarks that the prosecution's "case was so weak and [Scott's] rhetoric so verbose that the jury found the accused not guilty of sedition". But the verdict had more to do with the unwillingness of Englishmen in that year to go the whole length of the government's definition of "constructive treason"; and with the aristocratic disdain that helped Erskine to discredit under cross-examination the working-class witnesses on whose testimony Scott's case was founded: he dismissed one with the words, "I am tired of your face". This event belongs, of course, to Shelley's childhood; but Foot's lapses extend well into the mature years; they are especially apt to occur where any judgment of personality is called for. After quoting long stretches of "A Philosophical View of Reform", he wonders why Shelley failed to publish it in his own lifetime, and then speculates that Cobbett might have been just the man for the job. It is hard to indicate what is wrong with this judgment, except by directing readers to the complete works of Cobbett and Shelley. They were about as antipathetic as two contemporaries can ever have been. Cobbett named the name of "radical" Cobbett downright, practical, agrarian; Shelley visionary, theoretical, a builder of the just city. These are com-

monplaces, and one would avoid repeating them if they were not missing even from the ground floor of Foot's understanding.

Critical books have faltered worse than this on points of historical background, and still survived by the force of a central argument. The trouble with *Red Shelley* is that one cannot test the argument because one cannot find it. Foot seems equally interested in Shelley's poetry and prose, though he excludes everything that could be called a lyric, allegories like "The Witch of Atlas" and "The Sensitive Plant", which have no obvious political resonance, and "The Triumph of Life", possibly because it does not square with his title. Still, that leaves a great deal. In prose, from the *Queen Mab* notes and "A Vindication of Natural Diet" to "A Declaration of Poetry" and "A Philosophical View of Reform", Shelley moved from a dogmatic creed of atheism and necessity to a trust in the cooperation of the spirit of the age with the voluntary efforts of men. The poetry has its backward looks and recalcitrant interludes, but there too Shelley advanced with steadily widening sympathies. Progressions of this sort Foot leaves us to trace for ourselves. His plan is to ransack at Shelley's that offers an extractable opinion. The relevant quotations are then displayed under such chapter-headings as "Republican", "Atheist", "Leveller", "Feminist", and "Reform or Revolution". The liveliest sub-headings, "The Contradiction Exposed" and "The Contradiction Resolved", turn on what might seem a difficult question, the political morality of revenge. But in these sections, for thirty pages or so, Foot comes very close to presenting a thesis, and if elaborated it would be a controversial one. He believes that Shelley began with a firm suspicion of revolutionary violence and ended in whole-hearted acceptance of it.

The bulk of his evidence is drawn from *Prometheus Unbound*. A concise summary of the plot, a paragraph each for Prometheus, Asia, and Panthea, and Foot is ready to ask "Who was Demogorgon?" - to which he replies with a striking piece of etymological research:

One answer, a very obvious one which is often overlooked, is that he was who his name said he was. Shelley was always making up names from Greek words. Demos in Greek means the people; gorgon, the monster. Demogorgon is the "people-monster".

After that it is all downhill. There was a radical working-class paper called the *Gorgon*, started in April 1818. From the possibility that Shelley heard of it, we make an easy transition to the probability that a copy reached him in Rome, while he was asking himself how to dispose of Jupiter. Foot's rechristening of Demogorgon has broad consequences for Asia's descent. She visits him, on this view of the play, to raise his class consciousness - essentially, to give him a good harangue. Her questions are all rhetorical questions, and are meant to remind the people-monster how unendurable its life has become. When sufficiently aroused it can be relied on to storm the barricades. Meanwhile Jupiter, also a student of etymology, hopes that the revolution will stay in the hands of its moderate or "Promethean" sect:

The tyrant begs to be judged and dealt with by the idealistic intellectual of his own class, rather than by the people. He knows that from the rebels of his own class he can expect mercy, and with mercy, probably a breathing space in which to reorganize his forces, to double his propaganda, and start the counter-revolution. . . . From the masses, however, there is no pity, no release, no respite, no refuge, no appeal. Jupiter sinks at once without a trace, taking Demogorgon and the ugly spirit of the revolution with him. Something of the oddness of this

will be plain even to a reader whose memories of the play have grown indistinct. Etymology apart - and Foot's is an extreme instance of the "Look, no hands" variety - three objections seem decisive. First, in order to assign Demogorgon so narrow an allegorical significance, one has to ignore the name he gives himself. "Awful shape, what art thou?" demands Jupiter; and he is told: "Eternity. Demand no Jirer name." This need not be the end of all speculation about him but it ought to be the beginning. A permanent difficulty for most readers is that they cannot regard the shoreless infinity of time as familiarly as Shelley did; when, to take another celebrated phrase, he calls poets "the mirrors of the gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present", the figure is somehow less uncanny to him than it is to us. But for Foot such difficulties do not exist. Nor do those which follow from a second objection, concerning Demogorgon's meaning in time. For he is named by Milton in the description of Satan's journey through Chaos and old Night (*Paradise Lost*, II, 965). Again this hardly closes the discussion, in which too the name is enigmatic. But it does finish off the *Gorgon* theory: a copy of the paper could not possibly have reached Milton before 1667, except on the supposition, which Foot expressly rejects, that Demogorgon is Eternity and conveyed it there himself.

A third objection graver than the rest is that Foot loves revenge, and Shelley hated it. Foot believes that the kings and tyrants of Shelley's poetry "vary in brutishness . . . But they are all anti-heroes, all to be challenged, hunted down and overthrown." Everything Shelley fought in his own life, every savagery of the moral systems he tried to explode, is contained in that one phrase, *hunted down*. He wrote *Prometheus* to portray a hero who breaks the cycle in which oppression can only be matched by counter-oppression, and curse returned for curse. For the cycle itself, he had come to think, was a kind of tyranny over man. Prometheus outdares the sublimity of Jupiter when he says,

torment and solitude,  
Scorn and despair, - these are mine empire.  
More glorious far than that which thou surveyest  
From thine unenvied throne. O Mighty God!

But he ceases to be Jupiter's rival and becomes Shelley's hero only when he revokes his curse. That is the moment of triumph, and psychologically the end of Shelley's drama. The action continues because

Prometheus is still chained to his rock, and Jupiter seated on his throne. Shelley needed an agent both more than human and less, to free the hero and punish his tormentor without delivering the audience into the satisfactions of revenge, and for this he invented Demogorgon. Yet far from vanishing when his work is complete - as Foot remembers him to have done - Demogorgon speaks the final lines of the play. They instruct us to conquer tyranny by means not themselves tyrannical. "To forgive wrongs darker than death or night." With these words compare Foot's litany, "no pity, no release, no respite, no refuge, no appeal".

One thing that seems to have misguided Foot is an episode of *The Revolt of Islam*, in which a tyrant, captured but then forgiven, returns to the same wicked practices from which he might have been stayed forever. Should he in fact have been killed? Was this Shelley's confession that on some occasions forgiveness may be wrong? Foot thinks so. But for Shelley a moral principle was at stake. He would have envisaged the worst possible outcome to show the value of upholding his principle anyway. *Prometheus* has a happier outcome, without turning justice into a licence to hunt; and yet it seems honestly to face the hunter's arguments. In this respect it was a great improvement over *The Cenci*, where Shelley had admitted that the whole interest of the drama lay in "the restless and automating casuistry with which men seek the justification of Beatrice". Her wish for revenge, though a "pernicious mistake", he explained as one necessary constituent of a tragic character. But *Prometheus* gave him a hero whose interest was not tragic in this sense. He could therefore claim that Prometheus was "a more poetical character" than Milton's Satan, because Satan "engenders in the mind a pernicious casuistry which leads us to weigh his faults with his wrongs, and to excuse the former because the latter exceed all measure". Beatrice followed Satan's pattern whereas Prometheus goes beyond him. Most readers have probably felt this, whether they know the prefaces or not. Yet Foot's very different view is a consequence of his reading as well as his politics: the work of Shelley's that got to him first, to which he still refers for his idea of Shelley's deepest strength, appears to have been not *Prometheus*, or the "Defence", or any of the odes, but *Queen Mab*.

The poem has always had its admirers, especially in the latter part

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## JOHN MURRAY



of the nineteenth century, among a distinguished group of middle-class rebels who might have acknowledged Show as the last of their line. But on the whole it has remained for Shelley's advocates the work from which his reputation must needs be protected, and for his antagonists the right place from which to launch the attack. Paul Foot is so unwary an advocate that he becomes an antagonist by default, but perhaps there is something in the poem itself that makes this happen. All the apologies for his youthful extravagance have not concealed the fact that *Queen Mab* is rant. It is rant because its sentiments, however heartfelt in general, are unfit in every particular. This is easy to see in the famous set-pieces denouncing God, and only a little less so in ordinary passages of exposition:

Blind and hardened, they,  
Who hope for peace amid the storms of care,  
And sweet power they know not how to use,  
And sigh to please the sense to give,  
Mully they frustrate still their own designs:  
And, where they hope that quiet to enjoy,  
Which virtue pictures, bitterness of soul,  
Pining regrets, and vain repentances,  
Disce, disgust, and lassitude, pervade  
Their valueless and miserable lives.

This is the Shelley who, because he made no allowance for the common passions of men, was sometimes worse than useless to the cause he took up; who wrote sentences so apocryphally bigoted that it is impossible to guess their context, and any context makes them absurd. "How much longer will man continue to pimp for the glutteny of death, his most insidious, implacable, and eternal foe?" In the years of *Queen Mab*, that was Shelley's way of announcing that he would not eat meat. He talked like a man who could never forgive wrongs darker than the shadows at noon; and Peacock caricatured him as the author of *Philosophic Gas; or, a Pro-*

phet by a General Rhinoceros of the Human Mind.

*Queen Mab* is as good a starting point as any other poem of Shelley's. But he was angry when a pirated edition made it compete with his later poems; and to employ it as a touchstone for them is monstrous. Can it nevertheless serve as a touchstone for his politics? — or are his politics, where they still have something to teach us, closer to the spirit of his greatest poetry? With an active and wholly serious intellect like Shelley's, the distinction between inspiration and sense may be less rewarding than it looks, and Foot concedes far too much when he says that "as a warbler, Shelley is at fault." There is a sloppiness and excess in his language and his metaphors which the discipline of a Keats or a Wordsworth would have ironed out. Equally surprising is a contrast he proposes more than once, between "lyric excesses" and a "cold and clear" delineation of society. Judgments like these are all the more curious in view of Foot's declared purpose of freeing us from the academic prison. For they reproduce an academic stereotype of Shelley which was pervasive between 1930 and 1960 — roughly the years of Foot's childhood and education. The only difference is that in the earlier version we were asked to read the lyrics or nothing, and in Foot's we are allowed if we like to dump the lyrics, so long as we hold on to the politics.

Fortunately we need not make the choice. It is wiser to begin any appreciation with Wordsworth's praise of Shelley for his "workman-ship". He knew that Shelley's work was remote from his own but hardly a failure of its kind, and seems to have understood better than most readers his refusal to connect success in poetry with success in looking steadily at his subject. Shelley's genius was too fluent to be mastered by Wordsworth's appeal for the clear and distinct image, and it gathered force at the point where hatred of Wordsworth's politics coincided with

the search for a style less pledged to the visible. This view of Shelley's poetry is not new. It was sketched three decades ago by his most eloquent modern defender, Frederick Pottle. Yet it is remarkable how few critics since then have used it to widen the discussion of Shelley's politics. Anyone who wishes to pursue the experiment further can read in sequence "Alastor", "To Wordsworth", "Peter Bell the Third", and "The Triumph of Life". In one way "Alastor" is the simplest case, since we can imagine the question Shelley asked himself before he wrote it: "What would become of *The Excursion* if the solitary refused all correction, and the poet refused to side with the world against him?" The poem, "excessive" and very great, was Shelley's answer and for him its politics were implicit.

Again, with "Peter Bell the Third", the provocation came from Wordsworth's poetry, but the response for Shelley could hardly stop at parody. As a parody his poem is not as good as J. H. Reynolds's; as an invective it outdoes Byron; for its power is that of the stump-orator who has lost the battle to control his anger. One of Wordsworth's anti-Napoleonic odes had prayed to the God "whom most dreaded instrument / In working out a pure intent, / Is Man — arrayed for mutual slaughter, / — Yea, Carnage is thy daughter!" In answer Shelley must have planned to fill a stanza, but then he sat down to write:

Then Peter wrote like the Devil; —  
In one of which he meekly said: —  
"May Carnage and Slughter,  
Thy niece and thy daughter,  
May Rape and Famine,  
Thy gurge ever cranning,  
Glut thee with living and dead!  
"May Death and Damnation  
And Condemnation,  
Flit up from Hell with pure intent!  
Slash them at Manchester;  
Glasgow, Leeds and Chester;  
Drench all with blood from Arden to Trent.  
"Let thy body-gard yeomen  
Hew down babes and women,  
And laugh with bold triumph till  
Heaven be rent!

When Moloch in Jewry  
Munched children with fury  
It was thou, Devil, dining  
with pure intent."

His protest against the massacre at home has its start in one glimpse of the hellish countenance of the poet who sang the glories of massacre abroad.

"To Wordsworth" and "The Triumph of Life", at the beginning and end of Shelley's debate with Wordsworth, show how inseparable throughout were its political and poetic topics. In the early sonnet, Wordsworth's betrayal marks the passing from sight of "a lone star, whose light did shine/On some frail bark in winter's midnight ray." Six years later, in the "Vision" that Shelley left incomplete, he returns to the "Immortality Ode's" light of common day, which has become "a cold glare, the stars are all hidden now, and enough common light is confused with theirs to obscure them for ever. Instead of Wordsworth's child, 'who daily farther from the east/Must travel', we have the shade of Rousseau, like "an old root which grew / To strange distortion out of the hill side", who invites Shelley to join the dance of death, and by recounting his fate tells why hope was made to be conquered. This is Shelley's ode to the east wind, and it deserves more readers among those who will not accept it as his last word in any but a trivial sense. The last word, if we need it, came in "Two Spirits: An Allegory", which Shelley wrote as a dialogue. He worked into its figurative language both the political risks he took — "The clasp of the hail across the plain" does not refer to weather — and his resolution to continue as he had begun:

I see the light, and I hear the sound;  
I'll sail on the flood of the tempest dark,  
With the calm within and the light around  
Which makes night day;  
And thou, when the gloom is deep and stark.

Look from thy dull earth, slumber-bound,  
My moon-like flight thou then must mark  
On high, far away

How far away was he in 1822, the year of his death? The temptation for a revolutionary like Foot is to say that he grew steadily more vehement as the times grew worse. But the evidence tells more than one story. Shelley's defence of the Neapolitan rebellion against King Ferdinand, with the remark in a letter to Mary "That kings should be everywhere, hostages for liberty were admirable", does not commit him to the support of a violent revolution in England. Naples and Austria were warring states, and the King owed his power to Austria. Shelley was sickened almost beyond despair by Peterloo and the terrible events of 1819; he would have given his life to rid England of those who ordered the slaughter, or endorsed it afterwards, but he did not conceive of his homeland as two warring states; and the break in the manuscript of "A Philosophical View of Reform", after the clause, "If the madness of parties admits no other mode of determining the question at issue . . .", indicates clearly enough at what point his speculations stopped. We can regret that they did, and follow Mr Foot in supposing he would have approved of a less one-sided slaughter. Or we can applaud the firmness with which toward the end of his life, he suspended his efforts as an agitator to leave his testimony as an articulate witness. In that role he could speak not less politically, but for all time. The objection that this was somehow a retreat he anticipated in "A Defence of Poetry", where he called time itself "the mediator and redeemer". But this belief only strengthened his confidence in the human agencies of change. In the same essay he defined poetry as what the mind made of its best and happiest moments, and gave as examples the tragedies of Athens, the republican institutions of Rome, the truths of Jesus Christ, Bacon, Dante, and Milton.

The disarray of the *Biographia* is dictated by the intimacy of the *magnum opus*. The task of the great work was to assert "Christianity the one true Philosophy" (a title announced by Coleridge in 1814) and to defend the Christian God against the Spinozism and against the materialist philosophy of process that eventuated in Darwinism.

The other great work of English Romanticism which failed to get written, Wordsworth's *The Recluse*, was, at least in Coleridge's and Thomas McFarland's view, to have been a version of the *magnum opus*. McFarland, in his chapters both on "The Symbolism of Coleridge and Wordsworth" and on "Problems of Style", explains the failure as deriving from the estrangement of the two men. Though the case is obviously not quite so simple as that, he rightly insists on the urgency of Wordsworth's dependence on Coleridge in preparing to write the great philosophical poem: "I am very anxious to have your notes for the Recluse. I cannot say how much importance I attach to this."

McFarland's treatment of Wordsworth is at its most interesting when it is nearest to Coleridge, but it seems excessive to claim that "Wordsworth was not a poet of major significance because he came under Coleridge's influence" and that "he was never a poet of major significance after their break". His comments on style are forthright and useful, though in such a subjective area, while you may agree that the "six years' Darling of a pigmy size!" in the *Immortality Ode* is an embarrassing false note, you may wonder at McFarland's complaint about the repetition of the word "Forlorn" in Keats's *Nightingale Ode*: "what led him to this disparaging anadiplosis?" What indeed? To be fair, McFarland supplies a convincing answer; and throughout *Romanticism and the Forms of Ruin* his characteristic inelegance always provides a full and rewarding context.

## RUSSIAN HISTORY

ISABEL DE MADARIAGA:  
Russia in the Age of Catherine the Great  
\$89pp. Weidenfeld and Nicolson. £20.  
0 257 77394 1

Catherine has not been lucky with her biographers. Where other Russian autocrats have been immortalized by a Theodor Schiemann or a Reinhard Wittram, the sheer extravagance of the great empress's personal life seems hitherto to have condemned her to mishandling by retailers of romantic court gossip. True, there was the worthy V. A. Biltasov, who a hundred years ago began an exhaustive scholarly study of the reign, but for reasons that have never been satisfactorily explained his work did not progress far beyond Catherine's accession by the coup d'état of 1762.

In recent decades both Soviet and Western historians have explored a number of specialized aspects of late eighteenth-century Russian history, but no one was bold enough to try to draw the threads together. The task seemed dauntingly difficult: the published sources are legion and widely scattered, the archives difficult of access. Twelve years ago Isabel de Madariaga, of the University of London, took up the challenge. She has produced what for a long time to come will stand as the definitive work on Catherine and her times — judicious, balanced and remarkably well informed. At last the empress is considered as she deserves to be: as a stateswoman, a consummate politician who could bring the best in her subordinates, a far-sighted planner whose very faults have a touch of grandeur about them. Social, economic and administrative aspects of the reign are all dealt with in full, as of course is foreign policy, the field in which the author made her debut with a study of the Armed Neutrality of 1780.

It used to be said that here Catherine scored her most brilliant successes, for by war and diplomacy she greatly enhanced the wealth, prestige and security of the Russian empire. Such views command little sympathy today, at least in the Western world. Anyone seeking to understand the historical roots of the present Polish crisis will find this work a towering reading. It was Catherine's enlightened but ruthless government that took the lead in destroying the Polish state by the partitions of 1773-95 — an act which shocked even hard-bitten contemporaries. After all, by a treaty of 1768 St Petersburg had solemnly undertaken to guarantee the integrity of the Commonwealth, which was ruled by a Russian nominee. Some of the tactics employed have a distressingly familiar ring: bribery and manipulation of local dignitaries, steadily increasing dosages of military force, and propaganda that justified each move in terms of European peace and stability. Most of Catherine's advisers endorsed her forward policy, and she overruled those who did not. "We can do whatever we want in Poland", she minuted at one point, after the Polish Diet had adopted the Constitution of May 3, 1791. This document was "in no sense Jacobinical", Professor de Madariaga comments, "but to Catherine there was not . . . much to choose between revolutionary Poland and revolutionary France". Intervention in the foreign country was both more feasible and more rewarding.

The partitions brought into the empire several million non-Russians — Jews and Lithuanians as well as Poles — who were to prove difficult if not impossible to assimilate. Worse still, for the next century or so, Russia's foreign policy was tied to that of her partners in the crime, Prussia and Austria. Nationalists as well as democrats often protested against this, but *Realpolitik* had to take precedence. The long-term disadvantages outweighed the immediate gains, and the conventional judgment needs revision. De Madariaga minces no words: "it is here, in the field in which she prided herself on her skill, that [Catherine] did the greatest disservice to Russia".

## The enlightened empress

By John Keep

she writes. "The authoritarian and disagreeable tone adopted towards the Poles foreshadows the Stalinist style of diplomacy in the twentieth century."

Should the same be said of the Turks? They get little sympathy here, although they were the next most prominent victims of Russia's imperial expansion during this period. This attitude reflects partly the traditional bias of Western historiography, and partly a feeling that the Ottoman conquests had been more violent than the Polish, so that Turkey's decline seems somehow a natural phenomenon which excuses the predatory policies of her Christian neighbours. Yet there was nothing inevitable about the fate of the southern steppe-lands during Catherine's reign. Her aims at first were very moderate: little more than commercial access to the Black Sea. It was the great military and naval victories of 1770, Russia's *annus mirabilis*, that whetted the imperial appetite. Soon she was calling for the conquest of Azov and the Crimea, for a temporary Russian occupation of the Danubian provinces (the modern Romania), and even an island or two in the Aegean.

This alarmed other European powers, especially Austria. Maria Theresa first tried to bolster the Turks but then, after Catherine called her bluff, settled for compensation at the Poles' expense. Her successor Joseph II was still more forthcoming, for he entered into an alliance with the formidable empress and in 1787 went to war on her side. Meanwhile Russia had absorbed the formally independent Crimean khanate, and as a result of the second Turkish war she advanced her southwestern frontier to the Danister. It was now the turn of the British to express concern; but slogans were dubbed on the walls of London, "No War with Russia", and Pitt's Triple Alliance crumbled.

In conventional terms the vast expenditure of Russian blood and treasure was worth while. The fertile plains of New Russia could be developed as the granary of the empire (and of much of Europe too) in the following century; the new fleet at Sevastopol dominated the Black Sea and would soon penetrate the Mediterranean; and the way was open for further conquests in the Caucasus. But the advance of imperial power, borne on a great tide of peasant settlers, spelt the loss of the liberties enjoyed by the Cossacks of the Dnieper and the Don. Serf bondage was extended to the rural inhabitants of the old Ukraine (or "Little Russia", as it was patronizingly called by officialdom), and later in the southlands as well. De Madariaga stresses that this was as much the work of the local Cossack élites as it was of St Petersburg. On the Don in particular the violent uprising of Emelyan Pugachev in 1773-74 intensified the eagerness of the *starshina* to align themselves with the Russian nobility by rendering service to the state.

Grigory Potemkin, Catherine's eccentric but gifted consort, whom she appointed viceroy of New Russia, was a flexible and generally benign administrator. Only later did bureaucratic centralization become the rule in all Russia's borderlands. Catherine initiated this development, but its realization was still a far-off dream. She knew she had to temporize. As she put it in a memorandum to the procurator-general A. A. Vyazemsky, the lynchpin of her administration for over a quarter of a century, "Little Russia, Livonia and Finland . . . should, in the gentlest manner, be brought to the point when they become Russian and stop looking like wolves to the monkeys". She used the prestige of the monarchy to persuade the more pliable elements in the local leadership, who often were also the most enlightened, to collaborate with the central power in its reformist policy. The old particularist, oligarchical institutions were gradually undermined until they could be safely abolished.

But what advantages did the non-Russian peoples derive from integration into the all-imperial structure? This is still hard to determine, for we lack detailed statistics. One German historian of Livonia compared Catherine to Tamerlane: in ten days, he

asserted, she destroyed what had been painfully built up over 250 years. This was clearly an exaggeration, for the Baltic German nobles and burghers remained in positions of control locally, as indeed they did even after Alexander III a century later. Both in the Baltic and in the Ukraine, it seems, the poorer nobles and middling groups did slightly better, while the peasants gained least — and the state gained most. This was what Catherine wanted; it could tap resources, human and material, hitherto controlled by local élites.

The real obstacle was the lack of experienced bureaucratic personnel and of a legal tradition. Catherine endeavoured to separate the judicial from the executive power and to improve the court system, but progress could only be wretchedly slow so long as Russia lacked a lawyer class, a school of jurisprudence, and even a legal code systematizing the edicts currently in force. These advances came only in the nineteenth century. The Great Commission of 1767 was supposed to codify and reform the law according to the most enlightened principles of the day, which the empress herself set forth in her celebrated *Nakaz*. But the experiment was a failure. Catherine's thinking was far ahead of that of practically all her subjects. Given the rare chance to express their views in public, the deputies did little more than submit jumbled lists of grievances or ventilate their social prejudices.

A few sensible voices did make themselves heard. One Cossack deputy suggested mildly that if a serf denounced his master the courts should take account of his evidence. Uproar ensued. A poor landowner named Maslov pointed out that at present a peasant was beaten by his master if he refused to obey the law but beaten by court order if he did as he was told. He quoted the *Nakaz*: "let the people fear the law and not the law". But before such liberal sentiments could strike root the Great Commission had been prorogued.

This did not happen, as we should be told, because Catherine feared the deputies' radicalism. As de Madariaga notes, the official reason given at the time, that their services were needed at the front, turns out to be the right one. However, her conclusions on this affair are too sanguine. No doubt the debates did give the empress "much necessary information when, at the end of the war with the Porte, she was able to turn to internal reform again", but these reforms fell far short of what she had originally intended and were issued from on high, without the active participation of public representatives. This was a tragic mistake, for at this stage constructive cooperation between the state and educated "society" was still quite feasible and would have built up that sense of legality which the empress rightly strove to inculcate.

What soured the situation was the Pugachev revolt, which badly frightened both government and gentry. De Madariaga has no time for the romantic myth-making about this insurrection fashionable in some quarters. She shows convincingly that at the start Pugachev had no thought of unleashing a serf revolt, but resorted to this as an expedient during his campaign; that the development of a counter-government, complete with aristocratic titles, could scarcely be reconciled with the rebels' egalitarian ideals; and that despite efforts to impose discipline they remained a disolute rabble: "executions took place at any moment; the surrounding ravines were full of unburied corpses; drunken feasting was common". This was no "peasant war" (as Soviet historians maintain) but a protest against the innovating absolutist state by lawless frontiersmen who hankered after a retrograde traditionalism. Peasants who joined the movement often did so under duress.

Catherine urged mercy in the treatment of the rebels, and by eighteenth-century standards their fate was not unduly harsh. However, she contented herself with measures to strengthen the local administration and failed

to grapple seriously with the social grievances that had fuelled the insurrection. The 1785 nobles' charter, which guaranteed and expanded their privileges, said nothing about relations between masters and serfs. At that juncture, de Madariaga suggests, the empress could go no further:

It was not fear of the nobility which prevented Catherine from intervening decisively in the vexed field of serfdom. It was rather the conviction, particularly deeply rammed home by the Pugachev revolt, that the time was not yet ripe to tackle a problem so closely linked with public order, finance and military strength.

This argument will not convince everyone. Why did Catherine abandon a draft project to grant a measure of autonomy and security of property to the state peasants? This would have strengthened the government in its dealings with noble serf-owners. It is true that Catherine deserves credit for limiting the ways in which free men could be enlisted, and that the charges levelled against her by nineteenth-century Populist writers — for instance, that she curbed the peasants' right to petition the crown against their masters — were exaggerated. Nevertheless it does seem that after 1774 she lost her nerve and opted for a policy of procrastination and passivity. Even in her early liberal phase she believed that peasants worked better if they were tied to the land. Her object was to eliminate the worst barbarities of serfdom, not to upset the system. We cannot reasonably expect her to have emancipated the serfs, for this would have necessitated a loyal bureaucracy (and a credit network) that did not yet exist; but some move towards regulation of dues, as was attempted in the Baltic, was not beyond the bounds of possibility.

If Catherine emerges a little whiter than white here in regard to social issues, she deserves the praise she gets for her enlightened cultural policy. She did much to encourage the visual arts, as every visitor to Leningrad can testify. She held tolerance to be a virtue: from 1783 anyone could set up a printing-press, if the police were notified; and censorship was remarkably

lax by later standards. The persecution of such free-thinkers as Novikov and Radishchev was regrettable, but she acted from *raison d'état*, not from wounded vanity as many critics have alleged. These were troubled times: the Russian masons maintained links with foreign countries; and Jacobin democracy was relevant to the country over which she ruled. Catherine has too often been judged by the repressive acts of her fearful last years. Instead of by her creative contributions to Russia's intellectual life — not perhaps her own indifferent literary ventures, but her readiness to foster an independent spirit among the nascent intelligentsia.

The eccentricities of the empress's emotional life are discussed here straightforwardly and receive the modest share of attention they deserve. Much can be explained by the unfortunate circumstances of her first courtship. She was no monster, but a warm-hearted, generous woman, witty, courageous and versatile, who found in Potemkin a spirited consort worthy of her talents. Their partnership had a moving quality rare in royal annals, and as with everything Catherine did it had its rational political purpose. She was of course inordinately vain, and indulged in a fondness for extravagant display that today, when we expect our rulers to behave with less ostentation but more capriciously. Although she wielded almost unlimited power, Catherine seldom abused it. She was a humane person who sought to civilize social and political relationships in her still barbarous empire. Nineteenth-century writers used to speak of "a softening of morals", and the term is not inapt. She tried to encourage what de Madariaga calls "a civil cast of mind", and up to a point she succeeded: "Russian society relaxed in a new-found sense of security". The despotic tendencies latent in the autocracy were contained. The progress achieved could not be undone even by such narrow-minded disciplinarians as Paul or Nicholas I: it would take a revolution to do that.

Isabel de Madariaga's well-rounded portrait of the great Catherine does belated justice to a ruler who drew Russia closer to Europe at a time when both stood to profit from such contact.

## Finite, fleeting fragments

By Christopher Salvesen

THOMAS MCFARLAND:  
*Romanticism and the Forms of Ruin*  
432pp. Columbia and Princeton University Presses. £17.55.  
0 691 06437 7

"Put together with a pitchfork" was Leslie Stephen's view of *Biographia Literaria*. Thomas McFarland's book seems to invite a similar verdict: "this volume has been conceived as a series of dispirations" — that being his coinage, in the Coleridgean manner, to express Romantic ideas of incompleteness, fragmentation and ruin, what he rather grandly calls "the dispirating triad".

Actually, the third term gives a misleading emphasis to the title of the book, which has relatively little to say about ruin and virtually nothing, *pace* the blurb, about ruins. Ruin implies a previous condition, something that once was whole; but *Romanticism and the Forms of Ruin* deals much less than you might expect with the sense of the past. It is really about a different matter, incompleteness, especially Coleridge's incompleteness and in particular the incompleteness of his *magnum opus*, which Professor McFarland is currently engaged in editing. Of course, ruin also carries a sense of self-destruction (as in "blue" or "mother's ruin") which might well be applied to Coleridge; and the Romantic mind in general was always capable of regarding the present as "a ruin of the past's possibilities": the chapter called "The Significant Group: Wordsworth's Fears in Solitude" shows the poet struggling "amid the ruins of his earlier confidence in social man". But when in his introduction McFarland remarks, "The Gothic Church to which Wordsworth compared his life-work is no less a ruin than the heap of West Country stone called Tintern Abbey", we are justified in suspect-

ing that the Ruin of the title is a bit of rhetorical colour somewhat emotively and carelessly thrown in.

Fragmentation is our subject, and the extended introduction is a fascinating if ultimately rather over-determined survey of Romantic examples of fragmented work and of Romantic thoughts on the fragmentary, on the fleeting, on the finite and the infinite. As McFarland reminds us, his earlier meditation on Romanticism, *Coleridge and the Pantheist Tradition*, stressed the prevalence of systematic concerns in the Romantic epoch. Reticulation, Coleridge's desire to encompass everything within the one net, was the key word there. The present book is not a repudiation, but a "necessary complement". It asks philosophically "how can a fragment be identified as a fragment unless there is also the conception of a whole from which it is broken off?" While contemplating various aspects of Wordsworth and Coleridge, it aims to show the interpenetration of poetry and philosophy, and culminates in a theory of transcendence as the ultimate goal of all imaginative activity. Life is seen in Heidegger's formulation as a condition of *ständige Unvollständigkeit*, continuing incompleteness. Coleridge's poetry strive "to overcome the sense of loss by compensating for such fragmentation", but although they may approach places and horizons far beyond the ordinary world and go some way towards temporarily restoring an idea of wholeness, in the end "the only wholes encountered in experience are themselves fragments". But at least a glimpse of higher truth has been gained: "the only true whole is a transcendently constituted whole."

This conclusion is not arrived at organically; as already noted, McFarland draws attention to the mimetic nature of his book. "Its Coleridgean table of contents", he remarks, "is designedly jagged, and its various chapters . . . are at the same time deliberately fragmentary and auto-

nomous in formal conception." A sound enough principle of critical decorum is at work, though it produces some comically self-regarding moments. He quotes an engaging notion from Friedrich Schlegel, "A fragment must like a small work of art be quite separated from the surrounding world and complete in itself like a hedgehog", and states that two of his chapters — which he calls landscapes — "are designed to be impedances to a conventionally unitive reading".

This kind of prose, which crops up from time to time, is presumably a bit of harmless sub-Coleridgean fun. But the reader's sympathy is more severely tested by a statement made a few pages further on — "In truth, one way of viewing this book might be to see it as a prose embodiment of that displaced world of the 'greater ode' that M. H. Abrams has termed the 'greater Romantic lyric' — followed by talk of "the unevenness, the mass, and at the same time the unity claimed both by this volume and its poetic analogues". The volume bears not the slightest resemblance in form to the musical meditative driling structure of a Romantic ode or a Conversation Poem — as Abrams's meditation on Romanticism, *Natural Supernaturalism*, does. To make the comparison, McFarland's book doesn't seem to me to be a critical work of *that* order. All the same, and despite local irritations, it is an impressive, thought-provoking study. If it comes to go forward in the current transatlantic mode of aggrandizing the business of criticism, it is never-willfully unintelligible — though it is bracingly hard going because its range of reading and reference has such width and density.

In fact *Romanticism and the Form of Ruin* is much more straightforwardly coherent than its author suggests. Five of its nine chapters have already been published as separate articles or pieces ("Coleridge's Anxiety" for example); but they all hold together, like those of many other

books composed in the same way. And they are further connected by an expression of intellectual personality. They don't quite constitute "sketches of my literary life and opinions", the terms in which Coleridge qualified *Biographia Literaria*; they are more ordered and much less personal than that. But a virtue of the book is that it refers its arguments to the world outside it ("So much for the Jacobin mania of our own era"). Many such passing opinions or viewpoints are extremely tendentious but, shapings of the unregenerate mind" though they may be, they provide an appropriately Coleridgean indication of the difficulty — what some of his best early poetry explored — of relating poetic to social and political concerns. If the academic teacher and scholar are likely, at certain points in the academic year, to utter "Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement", these sentiments are often, in the Horatian pun Charles Lamb applied to that poem, "proper for a sermon"; but in this case they are justified partly by the fact that Coleridge himself delivered sermons and anyway by what they add to the texture of an already complicated book.

Coleridge as Christian philosopher is the hero of it all. McFarland deals sympathetically and penetratingly with the *magnum opus*, an elusive, purely ideal entity (it never got written) which nonetheless colours everything that Coleridge wrote. He explains and defends Coleridge's enormous production of dull and flawed prose.

Because of Coleridge's very special neurotic situation . . . the provisional nature of his prose writing actually allowed him a certain achievement that the ultimate demands of his poetry did not . . . By displacing the hope of classical status onto the conception of *magnum opus*, he was enabled to produce casual and *ad hoc* writing that, imperfect though it is, is nevertheless among the treasures of our language.

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## commentary

## Water under the bridge

By Gavin Stamp

London Delicately: 1750 to 1900  
Museum of London

It requires a certain imaginative effort to visualize the actual appearance of buildings in, say, the seventeenth century when confronted by prints by Hollar or Kip. Valuable though such images are as architectural and topographical records, the distorted perspective, the graphic conventions and the use of a hard engraved line all militate against a convincing suggestion of reality. This is particularly true of the oldest prints of London. The extraordinary interest and beauty of the city that has gone – the tight, rambling picturesque remains of old London, the City skyline created by Wren, the elegant formality of the newer West End – are more hauntingly preserved for us by Victorian photographs, the earliest of which date from 1839.

Paradoxically, however, by the time photography was invented, prints and watercolours were being produced whose sophistication and accuracy convey the character of British towns and cities almost as well as any photograph – sometimes better. The quality of the English topographical watercolour tradition is, perhaps, most generally associated with Romantic landscapers – by Cotman, Cozens or Turner – but a large number of watercolour artists turned their attention to urban subjects and have left a large number of paintings which are of great beauty and considerable topographical interest.

The founding of the Royal Academy in 1769 improved the status of watercolour painting and encouraged by the great demand for prints, particularly of the new buildings and other great changes effected in London by John Nash after the Napoleonic Wars. Topographical watercolours were reproduced by lithography or aquatint and superb prints were made, such as those by Thomas Shepherd in James Elmes's *Metropolitan Improvements of 1828* or those by Pugin and Rowlandson in Ackerman's *Microcosm of London*, 1808-10.



"Cane Chair Weaver" (1759), one of a group of watercolour drawings by Paul Sandby. Cries of London – from the exhibition reviewed here.

The original drawings and watercolours are more interesting than the engraved plates, and the exhibition *London Delicately*, from the permanent collection at the Museum of London, displays some of the most beautiful and accurate watercolours ever made in London. Many show buildings which disappeared before photography, such as the old Palace of Westminster and old London Bridge. There is a lovely watercolour by George Schurf showing the old and new London Bridges side by side in 1831 (Rennie's new bridge has of course sadly been replaced since), and a strange view by David Roberts of the "Debarcation of the Lord Mayor at Westminster Stairs" in 1830 – an event which in fact did not take place owing to fear of de-

monstrations – which shows old Westminster Bridge and the Palace before the 1834 fire. Other artists, like Frederick Nash, Thomas Malton and Paul Sandby are shown as masters of perspective technique and watercolour. Indeed, the close association between the topographical watercolour tradition and the development of the architectural perspective drawing is revealed by some of the later exhibits which are, in fact, architect's drawings of buildings never built.

The exhibition can only be described as entrancing. It is also very sad, as so much that was beautiful has gone. I wish that most of the pictures could be reproduced in a book.

## In love and war

By David Nokes

Trollius and Cressida  
Aldwych Theatre

Terry Hands has presented us with a production of *Trollius and Cressida* seen from the perspective of Thersites; "Lechery, lechery, still wars and lechery: nothing else holds fashion." We are offered a cartoon strip of grotesque images, crude, glaring and spectacular. Troy is a doomed city of jaded sybarites. Effete youths in satin tunics, chiffon veils and blond perms expend their listless energies in buggery and darts. The barbed wire that surrounds the city is interwoven with the lattice work of the gates, suggesting the enhancement that danger gives to pleasure.

Meanwhile the Greeks in their trenches are sad, slow, broken men. Their macho exploits are all things of the past, and they trudge around in black leather, relieving their frustrations in tired and cruel barrack-room rivalries. That front-line cliché, the lone harmonica, is used to sentimentalize their boredom and disillusionment. They are caught in a war of attrition for which no one now remembers, or cares about, the cause. Old Nestor (Oliver Ford Davies), bent double and supported on stunted crutches under his massive shield, appears as a forlorn crustacean, washed up on this alien shore. His immobility makes a fine contrast with the skipping, mincing steps of Pandarus (Tony Church) in Troy, an old queen regent in pink robes and twirling a parasol.

But these are caricatures, which pay more attention to the surface than to the subtleties of the play. And there is a high price to pay for it all. Ajax (Terry Wood) is played in *Monty Python* fashion as a roaring head-banger. This is very funny, until one is faced with the problem of crediting Ajax with some dignity and intelligence in his reconciliation scene with Hector. Calchas, a croaking zombie in a wheel-chair, is just plain wrong. There are no figures of dignity or authority in either

camp. Priam is a spindle-shaped progenitor, ghostly in his white sheet and flowing locks; Agamemnon a shell-shocked martinet, whose words are derided or ignored by all about him. Hector alone (Bruce Purchase), declaring "I must not break my faith", attempts to assert some residual connection between words and actions, motives and deeds.

Far more characteristic of this production is Pandarus's dribbling excitement, "Words pay no debts, give her deeds", and Trollius's contemptuous destruction of Cressida's last letter, "words, words, mere words". It's a version in which words generally are sacrificed to spectacle. Trollius (James Hazeldine) delivers his lines in a high-speed gabble. Our attention is deliberately distracted from the debates in the Greek camp, and from Ulysses' long speeches, by such farcical pieces of business as Agamemnon compulsively popping pills, Nestor slobbering his way through an orange, and Ajax practicing karate on empty ammo-boxes. It's a world in which people prate, but nobody listens. Both sides, in their commitment to thoughtlessness, seem intent on mutually assured destruction.

The most spectacular figure, whose semi-divine presence comes increasingly to dominate the more somber second half of this notoriously disjointed play, is David Suchet as Achilles. He emerges from his tent as the Mr Universe of the gay massage-parlour. He flexes his painted pectorals like a ring-master showing off to his Myrmidons, who appear particularly predatory with their insect-like antennae. He is at once controlled and menacing, cowardly and complacent. It is Achilles who presides over the marvellously balletic battle sequences in which music and lighting combine to bring the pent-up activity of the play to a climax.

Terry Hands has intelligently developed the hints in the text concerning the relationship of Achilles and Pandarus, until it becomes the only physically convincing relationship in the whole play. By contrast, Paris and Helen appear as ageing hedonists, engaged in a jaded ritual, and Trollius and Cressida as naive and romantic adolescents. Whatever view the characters in the play take of the war, they are in fact all caught up in an epic struggle of sexual jealousy and revenge.

In this production, the subject is the war; the love of Trollius and Cressida is relegated to a sideshow. They are victims of the war, and their intermittent appearances demonstrate the disruptive effects of time and appetite on creatures whose morality is as conventionally opprobrious as their desires. Cressida (Carol Royle) is a bored spoiled child, indulged by her uncle, and tired of being overshadowed by Helen. She loves it when, upon arrival at the Greek front line, she is immediately the centre of attention of a group of war-weary men without women. Trollius is a shallow youth in love with love, for whom both Helen and Cressida appear as "pearls". We are concerned less with the tragedy of these star-crossed lovers than with the process by which Trollius, like Menelaus and Achilles, finds an excuse in sexual jealousy for a millennial which discovers a less unsatisfactory outlet in mindless acts of violence than in meaningless acts of love.

For much of this production I found myself resisting the crude exaggerations of the imagery, the coarse elements of farce, the denial of tragedy, tenderness, or thoughtfulness. Yet towards the end the interpretation did seem to have made some raw sense of a play whose disparate elements often baffled a more sensitive treatment. In the final image of the play, Pandarus bemoans his own diseases, while heaving on the old barbed wire. What is the continuation of lust by abuse?

## commentary

## The Delphic Idea and after

By Oliver Taplin

Greek Tragedy on Film  
National Film Theatre

During the last twenty years there have been more than a dozen films inspired by Greek tragedy (several more than by Shakespeare). Derek Jarman's weird *Tempest* was in fact the first for ten years. The National Film Theatre showed admirable enterprise in collecting all these together in its programme for June, along with five or six others remotely related. Happily, the NFT gained access to the Greek *Tainiothiki* (Film Archive), a treasure house which Mrs Aglae Mitropoulos has managed to protect even from the interference of transient political regimes. This brought to London some films which have not, I suspect, been seen before outside Greece.

The most interesting was eleven minutes of *Prometheus Bound* in the ancient theatre at Delphi on May 9, 1927. All the modern Greek productions at Epidaurus and throughout the world have drawn sustenance from this event. Not that it was the first time Greek tragedy had been performed in modern Greece, even in the open. As soon as the "theatre" of Hierodes Atticus had been excavated in 1867, a group of students performed *Antigone* with music by Mendelssohn. (The nearby Theatre of Dionysus, where the great tragedies were originally produced, proved on excavation in the 1880s to have been damaged and altered beyond repair, and no play has, so far as I know, been performed there since antiquity.) Tragedies had been regularly put on in Italian in the ancient theatre at Syracuse since 1914, but in Greece itself before 1927 there were only museum pieces for the dignitaries in the dress circle; there was no living dramatic movement.

The turning point was the "Delphic Idea". The poet Angelos Sikelianos (1884-1951) was a visionary who thought that the world might be saved from rationalism and industrialism by "the female principle", blended with Orphism, Buddhism, Dionysus, Pindar and Aeschylus. He and his wealthy American wife, Eva Palmer, wanted to set up a university at the navel of the earth, the *Orphic Delphi*. Delphi at that time a primitive village. The university was to teach spiritual and communal values; and as a first step Delphic festivals were mounted in 1927 and 1930, where the productions of Aeschylus were one element along with athletics, handicrafts, folk dancing, and spiritual sessions of all kinds. It all received little official support – indeed Eva, embittered, left Greece. Sikelianos' idealism was undimmed, and much of his later work grew out of the Delphic Idea, but it never again found such substance.

Even on an exceedingly primitive piece of film the snippets are enthralling. A limping Hephaestus rivets the backcloth of the *Prometheus* and Mount Kirphys. In telling contrast the loyal and pacific Oceanids dance with graceful simplicity, lo, caught between gentleness and rugged power, rushes off to wander the world, and we hear his voice recede down the ravines. The choreography, the masks, the dolphin-ornamented costumes were all Eva's work. She wore the cloth on her own loom. The eagles are said to have left their eyries on the shining crags, the Phaidriads, to circle over this *Prometheus*. Zeus, the old tyrant, led reason to task for it was this production which liberated the performance of ancient tragedy in modern Greece from the authorities, from propaganda and chauvinistic pieties.

The Greek National Theatre was founded in 1930 and soon began regular productions of tragedy. An integral part of it was its drama school, which built up a training in spoken delivery and song, troupe-work and choreography; it also supplied other companies which have grown up. It

was in 1938 that the National Theatre first put on a performance. Sophocles' *Electra*, at Epidaurus, a site at that time well off the beaten track. Mrs Mitropoulos again produced a few minutes of film from her archive. Even without sound, the sight of Katina Paxinou clinging to the urn which she thinks houses her dead brother is powerfully stirring (before long Paxinou was to be filming *For Whom the Bell Tolls* in Hollywood). It is curious to see the great auditorium less than a quarter full for that historic occasion. There has been a festival there every summer since 1954, and it is rarely that fewer than 10,000 people are gathered there nowadays. Those who have been fortunate enough to get to a performance will know that the great majority of the audience are not tourists or intellectuals but

rather than from any textbook. The 1961 French film of Aeschylus' *Perseus* by Jean Prat, by contrast, suffered from too much deference to scholars. He had read that early tragedy was like an oratorio; so his chorus scarcely moves, even during the ghost-raising scene, but firmly stands its ground through interminable swelling discords. The costumes, obedient to the book, are "statuesque" – in fact the whole cast looks and moves like the ghost of the Commendatore.

Sophocles' *Antigone*, directed by George Tzavellas, and Euripides' *Electra*, by Michael Cacoyannis, were both issued in 1961, and both starred a little-known actress, Irene Pappas. *Antigone* turned from the theatre into Hollywood epic. Horses gallop through monumental gateways.



"Ode on der Genius, II", a print by Wilhelm Lehmbruck (1881-1919) being sold at Sotheby's today.

ordinary Greeks who have converged in a horde of buses. It is a live popular tradition.

A tragedy was filmed in its entirety during public performance at Epidaurus in 1961: Sophocles' *Electra* again. It is not a technically distinguished feat of photography, but it gives some idea of the accomplishments of the National Theatre and of the atmosphere of its performances, down to the clapping of the Epidaurian frogs. The play is built on the varied passions of one woman, and Anna Synodinou's performance pulls its audience into a vortex of anguish and exultation (though Orestes is played by the same actor as in 1938, and the camera ruthlessly turns to Orestes' *Electra* complaints about Orestes' long delayed vengeance). Her slow, full movements are all weighted with feeling; but above all it is her voice – her control of pitch, timbre, pace and volume – that grips even those with no knowledge of modern Greek.

Another stage performance preserved on film is Tyrone Guthrie's *Oedipus Rex* from the 1954 and 1955 seasons at Stratford, Ontario. Guthrie put his actors in grotesque masks and baggy cloaks and gave them claws for hands; his chorus writhes in fogs of frozen carbon dioxide like creatures from the swamps of Transilvania. The translation is distinguished only in the lyrics, and I found the highly mannered sing-song delivery rather absurd. My response to the film tallies with Margaret Bieber's to the original performance, which she records in her *History of the Greek and Roman Theatre*. "It had no power to move the audience... The movements were rigid, and stylized in the extreme... The theatre was too small for such a severe and gigantic mounting." The camera magnified these distortions. Yet some of Guthrie's public were highly enthusiastic. I suspect that they were impressed in the way that one might be by some primitive tribe, though with no notion of their significance.

Guthrie derived a specious authenticity from using masks; but their design, like the rest of the production, came from his strange imagination

Cacoyannis left both the theatre and the studio behind and went into the countryside of Greece. This was not arbitrary, since Euripides' *Electra* has been married off to a smallholder to keep her out of the way, and the play is set at a rural hotel, not before the usual palace. Cacoyannis was also able without wilfulness to turn to the work-songs of Greek peasant women for his choruses. The play is a study in anguish, hatred and remorse. Cacoyannis presents these strong emotions not through the minutiae of naturalistic psychological observation, but through formal grouping, significant movement and stylized close-up. The cinema has never been exclusively "photographic"; there has always been an alternative tradition (founded by Eisenstein) which presents human behaviour in an expressive artificial manner. Cacoyannis's crucial enterprise was to go wholeheartedly for this tradition.

His energies were enhanced by those of two others: Mikis Theodorakis who wrote the music, and the actress Irene Pappas. On one level this film marked the liberation of Greek tragedy from the theatre into the self-sufficient, non-biodegradable world of film. At the same time, this could never have happened without the modern Greek theatre, a tradition begun at Delphi in 1927. The stylized expressiveness, the disciplined fluidity of grouping, the techniques for conveying emotional intensity through voice and physique – all these were owed to the theatre.

It was ten years before Cacoyannis turned again to Greek tragedy with his *Trojan Women* (he had been responsible in the meantime for *Zorba the Greek*). In 1971 the Colonels were strutting in Greece, the Americans were slaughtering and being slaughtered in Vietnam, and Euripides' play about the futility of both victory and defeat was more than ever topical. The film was made in Spain, the dialogue was in English, the stars were international. Once more, Pappas petrified the audience with her performance of Helen, fatal not so much for her beauty as for her powerful spirit. Everyone will remember Vanessa Redgrave's throat stretched to scream when Andromache is told that her little son is to be thrown from the walls. But there is nothing memorable, good or bad, about Katherine Hepburn's performance as Hecuba, the bereaved and humiliated queen of Troy, the role which runs through the whole of *Trojan Women*. The catalogue of horror somehow lacks particularity.

Why was this by far the least successful of Cacoyannis's "trilogy" of Euripidean films? The suspicion lurks that it was partly because the dialogue was in English, losing – to foreign ears – the passionate obscurity of Greek. This complaint is not as mischievous as it might seem. Not only do we lack in the English-speaking theatre a tradition of intense stylized acting, but we have in real life no acceptance of uninhibited lamentation. Most cultures have their traditional expressions of grief. Margaret Alexiou has demonstrated (in *The Ritual Lament in Greek Tradition*) the continuity of the *mirolagi*, the ritual lament, from ancient to modern Greece. In some areas it is even improvised from traditional motifs: anyone who has come under the spell of Patrick Leigh Fermor's *Memoirs of a Pilgrimage* will not forget the Maniot *mirolagi* for the English almsman: "Such a bright star should never have fallen to the ground...". Instead, the English stifles distress or are embarrassed at its expression. This gives the acting of tragedy in Greek an incalculable advantage.

For his *Iphigenia* (1976), Cacoyannis returned to Greece and to Greece – it looks as though it might have actually been filmed at Aulis. Pappas, and Theodorakis also, seemed reinvigorated by re-establishing contact with their native soil. Euripides died with

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## commentary

his *Iphigenia at Aulis* unfinished, but it seems to have meant an uncomfortable uncertainty to hang over the desirability of the Greek "holy war" for which Iphigenia gives her life. Caccyannis simplifies this. His Machiavellian Odysseus and the Aytollah Calchas conspire to ensure the sacrifice. The wind was beginning to blow in any case, but the blood lust of the army had to be titillated.

Caccyannis's presentation of the many-headed monster the army (which is, of course, behind the scenes in Euripides) is most effective. A sea of gleaming torsos, a swell of brutal slogans, sweat, boredom, the suppressed violence of impatience. Against this background the finest scenes of the film are private and individual (and Euripidean). Tatiana Papamitskou as Iphigenia really does seem to be about fifteen, on the border between ingenuousness and grace. Her guileless yet mature pleas are unbearable. "It is sweet to see the light; do not make me see the underworld." I was the first to call her father, the first you called child... Costa Kazakos as Agamemnon meets the challenge, tortured by the trust and closeness of his daughter, humiliated and defensive before his wife, yet at the same time a public figure, a leader of men. And Papas gathers to herself all the bitterness and desperation of misused wives over the centuries as she pleads "do not force me to become evil to you." At the force and as she departs from the shore, the rising wind blows her black hair across her face like snakes, the snakes of an avenging Fury.

*Electra and Iphigenia* are to my mind far the best films yet made out of Greek tragedy; but they are not, I suspect, nearly so well known as Pasolini's *Edipo Re* (1967) and *Medea* (1971). For cinematographic virtuosity, for the exquisite juxtaposition of the beautiful and the repulsive, Pasolini may be supreme; but what about the films as tragedy, or as the concentrated portrayal of human suffering and its place in the multiverse? His *Medea* touches on anthropology but not on *anthropos*; it dabbles with patterns of culture, but when it comes to personal relationships it is cold. *Medea* (Maria Callas's only film performance) hovers with a brooding, priestess-like inscrutability, but what does she feel or think about Jason? Wistful glances at naked limbs are not enough. And there is nothing to make us feel that she cares at all about her children: they are child-performers, uncomfortable in the presence of a stranger, a great star. Euripides persuades us into circumstances where a mother might betray her own children, and makes us feel them.

Sophocles' Oedipus is driven by the will to know. He does not see how painful knowledge will be, but that is because he is human rather than because he is stupid. Pasolini's Oedipus is a moody, slow-witted man, driven primarily by his Oedipus complex. (Jean-Paul Vernant's demonstration, in *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece*, that Freud has no light to throw on Sophocles' play seems to me conclusive.) The best minutes of the film are at the beginning and the end, set in contemporary Italy. Everything in between is Africanized (thus, for example, the Delphic Oracle is a gaggle of which doctors squatting under a single tree in the desert). Is Pasolini making profound points about cultural relativity and "l'espèce humaine", or is it rather that he was fascinated with photographing the Moroccan landscape and its inhabitants? The simplicity and laicization which made *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* so direct and urgent lose their point here. *Edipo* is after all *Re*: to become the lowest of men he has first to be the highest, the brightest. (Yet I have to concede that Pasolini's film is more thought-provoking than a worthy but lifeless version of *Oedipus* made by a British company, directed by Philip Saville, at Dodona in 1967.)

I am aware of only one film of Greek tragedy which was not travelted by the National Film Theatre's net. In 1971, Vassilis Fotopoulos, the stage designer, made a film of *Orestes* (mentioned in Mel Schuster's *The Contemporary Greek Cinema*). It would have been

interesting to see it, if only because it was shot in Miami, a haunted land of towers and terraces which fifty years have turned from a crowded, viceroy-ruled society to a depopulated promontory. Some of the films which were shown, on the other hand, had nothing to do with Greek tragedy. Nikos Nikolaidis's *Euripide BA 2017* (1975), for instance, is a purely personal fantasy. Miklos Jancsó's *Elektra Szerelem* (*Elektra My Love*, for some reason Englished as *Elektra*) is based on a play by László Gyurkó which owes nothing detectable to Greek tragedy. We are given beautiful photography of what seems to be a folk-dance farm, of buxom Mitegar nudes and of horsemen in superbly laundered folk-shirts, but the content, which is pure political symbolism, seems banal and incoherent.

When films such as these were included it might seem odd to have omitted a work which does have connections with Greek tragedy and is one of the best new films for many years: Theodoros Angelopoulos's *The Travelling Players* (*O Thiasos*), first seen in 1975 - though I take it that this was because the National Film Theatre currently has a season devoted entirely to Angelopoulos.

Some have found *The Travelling Players* tedious, undisciplined, pretentious and naive. I readily forgive all its faults in return for its openness and power. For four hours without break the film traces the fortunes of a troupe of entertainers, though not always in chronological order, from the pre-war fascist regime of General Metaxas right to the election of the extreme right-wing government of Field-Marshal Papagos in 1952. The com-

pany's act is the Pyramus-and-Thisbe romance of Gullio the shepherdess and her swain Tasso, very tragic myth. But their performances are for ever interrupted: the secret police rounding up left-wingers; in 1939, the Italian invasion in 1940, the German occupation in 1941, the British "occupation" in 1944 (harshly condemned and satirized), and finally the civil war of 1947-49; a harrowing decade from which Greece emerged, in Angelo-poulos's eyes, an authoritarian monarchy, a source of loot for capitalism, a satellite and playground for richer nations.

But while Tasso and Golfo never manage to reach their union in death, the bloody tragedies of real life are carried right through to their catastrophes. The second man in the troupe betrays its leader to the Germans, takes over, and marries the wife. Her daughter dedicates herself to waiting for revenge; and eventually in 1945 her brother - Orestes - comes down out of the hills, where he is a communist guerrilla, to shoot his mother and her Agasthus on stage in mid-performance. Eventually he is captured and, unlike the Orestes of ancient tragedy, executed. Judgment is passed on him, however, at his burial, in one of the finest sequences of the film: as the earth is shovelled on his coffin the seven surviving members of the troupe stand and applaud, not just for a few seconds but for a full minute. Orestes has given the performance of his life.

Angelopoulos has turned Greek tragedy into the tragedy of Greece. *The thiasos* (which means more strictly the "troupe" or "company") symbolizes the Greek people. Every character

and event stands for some faction or attitude or event in the turbulent history of the time. But what makes this film so much better than the comparable allegories of Jancsó or Pasolini is that it also succeeds on a personal level: each member of the troupe is a fully convincing individual. Thus, as Elektra leads Orestes through the dark patrolled streets to revenge, while she is the ordinary people of Greece backing the partisans in the struggle against the collaborators with fascism, she is also a woman, tormented by loyalty to her dead father and hatred of his lascivious betrayers. The fusion of the solid and abstract makes an emotional and intellectual impact which is that of tragedy, in a way that is true of very few films.

Angelopoulos stands out like Poseidon from the New Ripple in the contemporary Greek cinema. A movement of young Turks (so to speak) gathered strength in reaction against the Colonels, and has produced some interesting films in the last ten years. They are very serious and very Greek. To some extent they define themselves by the repudiation of the image of the Greek purveyed by Dassin's *Never on a Sunday* (1960) and Caccyannis's *Zorba the Greek* (1964) - fun-loving, ignorant, impulsive: an image taken up by the package-tour brochures with their Aphrodite Beach Hotels and Zorba's Discos.

Yet the only film from a young director with declared tragic ancestry is Costas Ferris's *Prometheus* (*Second Person Singular*) (1975), a self-indulgent stream of whimsy, and a far cry from the Delphic idea. There seems to have been a rejection of ancient Greece as a symbol of conservatism and pedantry.

It is inevitable that modern Greek culture should have a love-hate relationship with antiquity: such a past is a monumental burden, impossible to live up to or to live without. Elvies writes "They gave me Greek as my language." The poor house on Homer's shores; but Seferis's image for the past is more oppressive - "I woke up with a marble head in my hands". The film-makers should, however, be able to feel more independent than the poets; and they have the vigorous theatrical tradition to tap. It is encouraging to learn that the fine tragic actress Aspasia Papanthassiou has recently set up a company of travelling players which performs ancient and modern plays throughout Greece in any available hall, playing-field or plateau.

Most of the films gathered by the National Film Theatre have been derived from the Oedipus and Elektra dramas. It is curious that certain other Greek tragedies have not inspired any cinema, not even those which offer some sort of timeless opposition between culture and nature, society and individual: Euripides' *Bacchae*, for example, or his *Hippolytus*. (I do not count Dassin's *Phaedra*, 1961, which does not begin to grapple with Hippolytus' asceticism, his rejection of carnality for the purity of the "uncut meadow".) Or consider the possibilities of Sophocles' *Philoctetes*. Personal and political, compromise, disease, hatred, friendship, a false world with intimations of a true one. All these "modern" preoccupations are given physical particularity in a wild setting of sea, crags and shore. Angelopoulos's metamorphosis of *Philoctetes* might awaken the dead.

## Dostoevsky and the Jews

Sir, - In his review of David L. Goldstein's *Dostoevsky and the Jews* (July 3) Robert Allen refers to the "Jewish fireman" who witnesses Svidrigailov's suicide at the end of *Crime and Punishment*. Not fireman, surely, but guardsman; more specifically one of the imperial guardsmen on ceremonial duty in St Petersburg, who wore an "Achilles helmet". Among those conscripted into military colonies by Arakcheev, the evil genius of the last years of Alexander's reign, were numbers of young Jewish boys from the pole. There seems no doubt that Dostoevsky's guardsman would originally have been one of these unfortunate.

One should never underestimate the range and potency of this novel's humour, a solvent of every sort of crackpot or disintegrable belief which the doctrinaire Dostoevsky may have had. This is a signal instance. Svidrigailov looks absolutely OK - blue-eyed, flaxen-haired, the ideal orthodox Slav - but in him there is only a repulsive emptiness and boredom. He is the accused and wandering Jew, at last going off "to America", as he says, raising the revolver to his head. Meanwhile the real Jew in his imperial Russian uniform makes the proper pronouncement of nationalistic orthodoxy: "You can't do that here here."

There is nothing arcane or symbolic about the episode. It is extremely and obviously funny, and thus humane. Nor does it matter if Svidrigailov is intended to be a Polish-Lithuanian landowner, another of Dostoevsky's dislikes. It makes it all the funnier.

JOHN BAYLEY.

St Catherine's College, Oxford OX1 3UJ.

## 'The Unmasking of Medicine'

Sir, - Ian Kennedy could hardly have asked for a better vindication of the criticisms of the medical profession made in his Reith Lectures than J. F. Watkins's testy review (June 26). Kennedy's first criticism was that judgments regarded as purely "medical" often involve judgments of value in the making of which a medical training confers no special expertise, eg, decisions to grant or refuse abortion, to switch off or continue life-support machines, to classify people as mentally ill. This Watkins regards as a puerile resentment of the authority conferred by "expertise and rationality", thus missing the point entirely - yet Watkins himself muses that "The problem in defining mental illness is that... it is not easy... to be sure what the term 'ill' means in this context", and that "What is certain" is that members of society are distressed by "the patient's" actions and words and turn to "experts" for help.

Kennedy's second, related, criticism is that medicine is concerned with scientific research to such an extent that insufficient attention and resources are devoted to means of avoiding "illness" in the first place - for example, the high rate of perinatal mortality among the working classes suggests that it might be sensible to devote greater resources to such unglamorous work as is done by social workers, at the expense, if necessary, of treatment which is far more expensive in terms of the lives likely to be saved, but in which the medical profession, because of its institutional values, has a far greater interest, such as heart transplants. Watkins's reply that if "a piece of equipment, costing a million pounds, could help to alleviate the lot of only one patient every ten years", then the doctor must get that equipment. demonstrates the point perfectly. Watkins's spluttering conclusion, describing Kennedy's work as absurd, trivial and immature, suggests that

Kennedy may at least have succeeded in wounding the intellectual arrogance of a profession which claims that "a mere layman could not possibly discuss intelligently the place of Medicine in Society".

ROBERT REED.

Balliol College, Oxford OX1 3BJ.

## W. H. Auden

Sir, - I'm surprised to find Peter Porter (July 3) suggesting that "none of us" can have seen Auden's "Tommy did as mother told him" verse before. Surely "Tommy" of us" who have read John Fuller's *Reader's Guide* - which Porter recommends elsewhere in his interesting review of Humphrey Carpenter's new biography - are well acquainted with that particular squib from the juvenilia.

JOHN MOFF.

11 Hill Street, St Albans, Hertfordshire.

## Ivan the Terrible

Sir, - It is a pity that your reviewer, Kyril Fitz-Lyon, does not quote with accuracy (June 5). He left out an important word in my opening sentence, in my book *Ivan the Terrible*, and introduced an example of teleology in another quotation. I began my biography with this sentence: "The Russians spare their tyrants. They kill only those monarchs that lack barbarity." Your reviewer omitted the word "monarchs", thus impairing its meaning.

On another page I referred to "religious and ideological" motives for expansion. Mr Fitz-Lyon altered this, in his review, to "religious and theological".

His criticism concerning etymology was completely unfounded. If he asks a Russian, or consults a dictionary, he will find that all the Russian words translated into English are correctly rendered. And his final comments about the absence of any mention of Russian policy and national interests suggests that he merely dipped into the book, as I deal with these topics in every chapter.

In one detail he was correct. Catherine the Great's war in 1796 was against Persia, not India. Details of Paul's campaign against India, that is the British, whom he expected to fight in Afghanistan, are given by the historians of that period, as your reviewer will discover.

He really should not blame a writer for the content of his quotations, as if I were making them up as I went along.

FRANCIS CARR.

20 Park Street, Brighton.

## Horace Walpole

Sir, - It seems to me that William Crowder's letter (July 3) - preferring that Walpole's correspondence be assigned to an English reviewer - betrays a lamentable chauvinism. Some years ago the *New York Review of Books* did exactly that, and the result was a curious "tribute", which I doubt that Mr Crowder would endorse. In this century, at least, eighteenth-century literary and historical scholarship has been produced, shared, and appreciated on both sides of the Atlantic. My tribute to W. S. Lewis contains no hint that it is confined to American or excludes English admirers. Although expressed in less fulsome terms than Mr Crowder's it reflects the appreciation of readers throughout the English-speaking world. Perhaps Mr Crowder will find some consolation in the fact that I wrote my review in South Kensington.

ROBERT HALSBAND.

The Garrick Club, Garrick Street, London WC2.

## Gaelic in the Highlands

Sir, - While I cordially salute James Hunter for his thoughtful review of my book *Scenes from a Highland Life* (June 12), may I gently rebut his assertion that speech I quote is not true to life because West Highlanders are in a tradition of learning English as a foreign language and hence do not speak it with impurities. Certainly it was once true, as he says, that West Highlanders were primarily Gaelic-speaking and learnt and spoke English as a foreign language. But that was all a very long time ago. He says it was "... a generation or two ago...". West Highlanders would say it was at least two; that takes us back to the 1930s, to the time when Gaelic was under the oppression and when, as one of my characters says, children at school were "... strapped mercilessly for speaking Gaelic". It would not be easy to find a teacher in the West Highlands these days, or even in the fairly recent past, who taught English as a foreign language.

A few pockets of mainly older people do survive in the West Highlands who fit Mr Hunter's image, but these are small and fading fast. In villages along the North-West coast, children tell me that their parents will not speak Gaelic to them. *Can't* is often nearer the truth. Again the ambivalence towards Gaelic, its culture, which I also deal with in *Scenes from a Highland Life*, undoubtedly contributes to parental attitudes.

Sad it may be, but the truth is that the once "pure" English diction that Mr Hunter has in mind has been heavily diluted - the result of many cultural influences; travel, sojourns in cities, military service, a wish to assimilate, the influence of "outsider" teachers in local schools, to mention but a few.

RALPH GLASSER.

96/100 New Cavendish Street, London W1M 7FA.

## Charles Compton

Sir, - Nigel Cross puts forward the suggestion (June 19) that the prospect of a pension was the reason for the decision of Charles Compton, an accomplished artist, to paint for pleasure rather than a livelihood. Provision for family and old age is a constant and not a contemptible preoccupation of mankind, and may well have been a contributory factor; but not the most important. With his evangelical background, this would seem to have been a matter of temperament. Never a robust man, of a gentle, puerile disposition, he may have come to see the bright circle of his youth as tarnished, and to feel that he was not cut out for the Bohemian life, preferring the discipline of office routine relieved by many interests; his domestic life bearing favourable comparison with his contemporaries'. Thus he chose a life that can be described as obscure in the sense that it brought him neither fame nor notoriety, but the record of which, even for one year, is of importance to the social historian as a piece of authentic manuscript material illuminating the lives of our ancestors.

EUNICE H. TURNER.

The Green, Littlebourne, nr Canterbury, Kent.

## Handel

Sir, - Your Commentator (Keith Walker, July 3) asks whether Handel's music was really performed at Queen Anne's court. He must surely know the Ode for the Queen's birthday, which Handel and his poet (Ambrose Philips?) would hardly have written unless a performance was at least expected.

RALPH LEAVIS.

Lincoln College, Oxford OX1 3DR.

"To the editor" is also on page 814, with "Among this week's contributors" and "Author, Author".

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## to the editor

## H. P. Lovecraft

Sir, - S. S. Praver's excellent review of S. T. Joshi's *H. P. Lovecraft: Four Decades of Criticism* (June 19) says many things that have long needed saying, but it does contain a couple of points that are disputable. As regards the number of novels that Lovecraft wrote: unless one uses a very limiting definition of a novel, Lovecraft wrote not one novel, but at least three - *At the Mountains of Madness*, *The Shadow over Innsmouth*, *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward* and perhaps, arguably, *The Shadow out of Time*. That H.P.L. had a distasteful penchant for "smash endings" does not keep these works from being novels, especially since *Ward* has a similar "surprise" ending.

On the number of Lovecraft's books published during his lifetime: I am sure that Praver knows the situation and avoided it because of its complexity, but Lovecraft had two such books. *The Shadow over Innsmouth* is unquestionable. The second, *The Shunned House*, depends on the definition of publication. Sheets of this book were printed around 1928, and a few copies were bound and distributed (with a copyright notice) by R. H. Barlow, a friend of Lovecraft's, while Lovecraft was still alive. In American law this probably constitutes publication.

On Lovecraft's knowledge of supernatural fiction: it was more limited than Praver states. Lovecraft had an excellent knowledge of Edwardian and contemporary supernatural fiction, but his knowledge of earlier material was limited. What he knew of Gothic fiction he picked up from Edith Kirkhead and Montague Summers, and went little beyond them. He was very weak on Victorian literature. He dismisses LeFanu

with a brief comment and seems to have been unaware of the work of Mrs J. H. Riddell, Mrs Henry Wood, Mary Braddon, Rhoda Broughton, and others.

Finally, Lovecraft's famous mythical book, *The Necronomicon*. The obvious translation of the title is based on *nekros* (corpse, dead person) and *-nomikos* (pertaining to management, as in eco-nomics), with *biblion* understood. The whole would be *The Book on the Management of the Dead*, or in modern parlance, *How to Control the Dead*, a truly necromantic work.

EVERETT F. BLEILER.

426 Spring Avenue, Ridgewood, New Jersey.

## Westminster Architecture

Sir, - I would like to draw the attention of your readers to the Architectural Archive for the Houses of Parliament that is at present being formed in the House of Lords Record Office.

The archive was set up following a resolution of the House of Commons Services Committee on March 21, 1979, "that a service be established for the collection, cataloguing and copying of architectural drawings and related matter relevant to the Palace of Westminster and its adjoining buildings, for permanent preservation with the records of both Houses". The work is under the joint supervision of the Librarian of the House of Commons and the Clerk of the Records, House of Lords, and has been in progress for eighteen months.

A first part of the archive is now in working order and is available to the public in the Search Room of the House of Lords Record Office. It contains photographic copies of the original drawings from which the Palace was built following the fire of 1834, and those of subsequent alterations up to the present day. A limited amount of material on the Palace before 1834 will also be collected. The major source of relevant

material is the Public Record Office, Kew, with important other sources at the Drawings Collection of the Royal Institute of British Architects and the Department of Prints and Drawings, Victoria & Albert Museum. Many of the drawings for post-war alterations are held by various branches of the Department of the Environment. The copies, which are selected for both their practical value and historical importance, are easy to handle and the detail is clearly legible. The accompanying catalogue also available in the Search Room is organized under topographical headings and provides brief comments on the actual state of the building compared with original design. I should emphasize that the archive is not yet complete and the work on it will continue for some years.

It is felt that the organization of this archive will make it possible to demonstrate both the history and the present state of the architecture of this splendid building more coherently than has hitherto been possible. It will provide a useful service both to scholars and also to those who have the current responsibility for maintaining, and, as instructed by both Houses, altering the Palace. A copy of the catalogue of the archive is deposited with the National Monuments Record.

The work so far has, however, revealed many gaps in a complete coverage. It is clear that several young draughtsmen took tracings and originals from Barry's office, and occasionally Westminster drawings have turned up in the sale rooms. A set of plans of the Palace were engraved in 1832 showing the building before the construction of the West front to Old Palace Yard, but only a ground plan is so far known to have survived. Almost no designs are known for the superb decorative woodwork of the mid-nineteenth century that was used throughout the building. It would be most valuable to include nineteenth-century photographs of interiors. J. Harrington's *Westminster Abbey and Palace*, 1869, with some excellent photographs, seems to be an isolated

example before a comprehensive survey was made by Sir Benjamin Stone in the 1890s.

I would like to appeal to your readers for information about any plans, designs or photographs of any date which they think may be relevant to this project, and of which copies might be made for inclusion in the archive. The House of Lords Record Office is always interested in acquiring such material.

A. WEDGWOOD.

Architectural Research Assistant, Record Office, House of Lords, London SW1A 0PW.

## 'The Lord of the Sea'

Sir, - No doubt M. P. Shiel's fine de siècle novels are not to everyone's taste and Julia Briggs is entitled to her opinion of the general merits of *The Lord of the Sea* (June 26). But potential readers of the latest reprint should not be put off by your reviewer's misleading reference to "its virulent antisemitism". In the closing chapters Richard Hogarth discovers that he is himself a Jew and rules that the re-establishment of a Jewish nation-state made possible a return to the primitive virtues of the simplicity and honesty that had been suppressed while Jews were dispersed throughout Europe.

## Among this week's contributors

FLEUR ADCOCK's most recent volume of poems, *The Inner Harbour*, was published in 1979.

P.R. AYA's books include *Möhringen and seine Esel* (Stuttgart, 1960), and *Carl Lüdger: His Chilled Reign* (Oxford, 1980).

JONATHAN BARKER is Librarian of the Arts Council Poetry Library.

ROBIN BRIGGS is a Fellow of All Souls College, Oxford.

DAVID BROMWICH teaches in the English Department at Princeton University.

RICHARD BROWN is co-editor of *The James Joyce Broadsheet*.

ROBIN BUSS is a lecturer in French at Woolwich College of Further Education.

HUMPHREY CAMPBELL's biography of W. H. Auden was published last month.

PATRICIA CRAIG's critical study, *The Lady Investigates: Women Detectives and Spies in Fiction*, a collaboration with Mary Cadogan, was published earlier this year.

JOHN CROOK is the author of *The Evolution of Human Consciousness*, 1980.

NIGEL CROSS is writing a book on the conditions of nineteenth-century authorship.

J.B. DONNE is the translator of *Gauguin's Noa Noa*, 1980.

ALASTAIR FOWLER's books include *Triumphal Forms: Structural Patterns in Elizabethan Poetry*, 1970, and *Concise Thought*, 1975.

DAVID GASCOYNE's *Collected Poems* were published in 1965. His *Journal 1936-37* was published in 1980.

ROBERT HALSBAND is a professor of English at the University of Illinois.

R.V. HOLDSWORTH's edition of Middleton and Rowley's *A Fair Quarrel* was published in 1974.

R.J. HOLLINGDALE's books include *Thomas Mann: A Critical Study*, 1971, and *Nietzsche*, 1974.

DANIEL KARLIN is a lecturer in English at University College London.

JOHN KEAR is Professor of Russian History at the University of Toronto and the author of *The Russian Revolution: a Study in Mass Mobilization*, 1976.

I might also point out that this novel was previously re-issued in 1929 by Victor Gollancz, of all publishers the one least likely to associate himself with any form of anti-semitism.

G. R. WOODWARD.

3 Gilbert Court, Green Vale, Hanger Vale Lane, London W5 3AX.

## 'The Pilot'

Sir, - In Chapter XXIV of Fenimore Cooper's *The Pilot* (1823), an American seaman mentions "Queen Anne's pocket-piece: which... sent a ball from Dover to Calais". Can any of your readers help the current editor of a scholarly edition of this work by identifying the source of the allusion?

KAY SEYMOUR HOUSE, Payson, Illinois 62360.

The Rev Brian A. Blade, Mr Edward Storey, and Mr George Dixon hope to establish a national John Clare Society, based in the poet's native village of Helpston, with the intention of providing information, arranging tours, conducting seminars and readings, and organizing an annual gathering of members to discuss the poet's work. Interested readers should write, enclosing SAE to the above at The Parsonage, Golden Drop, Helpston, Peterborough, Cambs for further details.

R.J. KNECHT is Senior Lecturer in History at the University of Birmingham.

HERMIONE LEE is the author of *The Novels of Virginia Woolf*, 1977.

LAURENCE LERNER's most recent collection of poems, *The Man I Killed*, was published earlier this year.

PETER LOMAS's *The Case for a Personal Psychotherapy* will be reviewed shortly in the TLS.

GEORGE MACBETH's most recent collection of poems is *Poems of Love and Death*, 1980.

JOHN MOLE's new collection of poems, *Feeding the Lake*, will be published by Secker and Warburg later this year.

ROGER MORGAN's books include *West European Politics since 1945: The Shaping of the European Community*, 1972.

ANDREW MOTION won the first Arvon Foundation/Observer Poetry Competition earlier this year.

DAVID NOKES is a lecturer in English at King's College, London.

RICHARD OSBORNE is a regular contributor to *Gramophone*.

GRAHAM PETRIE's novel *Sea Horse* was published last year.

JOSEPH RYKWERF's most recent book is *The First Moderns: The Architects of the Eighteenth Century*, 1980.

CHRISTOPHER SALVESSEN is Professor of English at the University of Reading.

THOMAS A. SEBBOK's latest book is *The Play of Musement*, 1980.

T.A. SHIPPY's books include a study of *Beowulf*, 1979.

FRANCES SPALDING's biography of Roger Fry was published last year.

GEORGE STEINER's books include *Heidegger and On Difficulty*, both 1980. His novel, *The Portage to San Cristobal of A.H.*, was published earlier this year.

OLIVER TAPLIN's most recent book is *Greek Tragedy in Action*, 1979.

TERENCE DE VERE WHITE's *Birds of Prey* was published last year.

DAVID WATKIN's books include *The Life and Work of C.R. Cockerell*, R.A., 1974, and *The Rise of Architectural History*, 1980.

## Massive freaks of fancy

By David Watkin

J. MORDAUNT CROOK: *William Burges and the High Victorian Dream* 454pp, John Murray, £40, 0 7195 3822 X

The weight and massiveness of William Burges's style are eminently characteristic of English architecture from 1850-70, though it is still not clear why the Gothic Revival passed through this phase, nor what its aggressiveness may have signified. The Burges style, bright, massive, eclectic and gem-studded, is perhaps most memorably and appropriately deployed in portable objects such as dog-collars, chalices, decanters, tea-pots and wash-stands. J. Mordaunt Crook writes with skill and authority between 1855 and 1859 it was Burges, above all, who opened up a new dimension in English furniture design; though it should in fairness be mentioned that some people might recall before picking up one of Burges's chalice decanters with its carved handle consisting of a monster with bat's ears, opal eyes and a lion's head, let alone bringing themselves to drink claret, richest and most delicate of wines, which had passed through a metal spout in the form of the head of a horned beast. Scarcely more alluring is the thought of drinking tea from the scaly tea-pot (plate 229) fashioned in the form of a dead fish with a flaccid rubbery eye prominent in the centre of each side. This is not a dream but a nightmare.

The obsessive, hallucinatory character of Burges's interiors and of the objects he designed for them suggest a mind if not bordering on insanity then reflecting aesthetically the impact of drugs: indeed Dr Crook tells us that Burges took opium, though not how much. It seems no coincidence that Evelyn Waugh came to suffer a painful delusion about the Burges wash-stand given him by John Betjeman and described in *The Ordeal of Gilbert Finfold* as a "most sickening of fancy". Pinfold's insistence that the elaborate painted wash-stand was originally provided with "a prominent, highly ornamental, copper tap in the centre, forming the climax of the design", was taken as evidence that his brain, in fact dragged by chloral, was suffering slightly.

Drugs, dreams and hallucination. These are the background against which Dr Crook chooses to paint his fascinating picture of the strange romantic world which Burges and his principal patron, Lord Bute, created round themselves. But while the account of Burges is admirable and scholarly, that of "the High Victorian Dream" is less convincing and more journalistic. Early in the book we find the explanatory phrase "The High Victorian Dream - that is, medievalism, as an instrument of Salvation". Yet if that is so, Burges cannot be the perfect exponent of it since, as Crook himself shows, he was not a religious man like virtually all the other Victorian church architects. Moreover, the identification of style with salvation is more characteristic of Pugin and Early Victorian thought. For a lucid definition of what High Victorianism means in terms of architecture we still need to turn to Stefan Muthesius's *The High Victorian Movement in Architecture 1850-1870* (1972).

It seems fitting that the first modern monograph on Burges, like so many of his own artistic products, should be a massive and costly object, rich in illustration, anecdote and scholarship. Everything is glittering, emphatic and larger than life, from the prose, jewelled with antithesis, paradox and alliteration, to the 272 plates which sparkle and astonish. The whole magisterial edifice, resting on an impressively firm foundation of seventy-two pages of notes and references (though curiously lacking a bibliography), is a triumph of imaginative scholarship and of distinguished book-production on which author and publisher alike are to be congratulated.

The volume begins with a series of funfair - Acknowledgements. Explanation. Prelude - of which the opening words, "This book had a tragic pre-history and a hazardous gestation", prepare us for the near-apocalyptic light in which the author views his endeavours. Comparing himself in interest, perhaps a little indelicately, with his subject, he explains that "Like William Burges, I returned to Gothic by way of reaction: a reaction in his case to the sterility of Neo-Classical scholarship" (he does not say whose). He also claims that the recent reaction against Modern Architecture is responsible for the present growth of interest in Victorian studies. The truth is more complicated as is shown, for example, by the dual role of Pevsner in promoting sympathy both for Victorian and for Modern Movement architecture. Why Crook should claim that "This light from Modernism has been part of a wider process: a light from reason", is also unclear. In the case of architecture I would suggest that exactly the reverse is true.

In 1970 Charles Handley-Read, the leading Burges expert, invited Dr Crook to write a monograph on Burges based on the source materials which he had acquired. Fourteen months later Handley-Read committed suicide and his widow Lavinia handed over to Dr Crook the notes, files, letters, slides and photographs her husband had assembled. Tragically she took her own life later in the same year. Understandably this sequence of events has had a powerful impact on Dr Crook. He thus prefaces his book with a full character sketch of Charles Handley-Read in the course of which we hear "Lavinia's voice tense and brittle as spun-glass" on the day of Charles's suicide, and he relives his last lunch with her at which "John Harris served trout and Scarlatti". It is difficult at the moment to know how far it will be helpful for future generations, for whom this book will remain the definitive study of Burges, to be made to approach the colourful halls of Burges's architecture through the eccentric ante-rooms of the Handley-Reads.

Burges received his first major architectural commission, for the Protestant Cathedral of St Fin Barre, Cork, in 1863 when he was already thirty-five. He died aged fifty-three, leaving behind him a comparatively small but stylistically arresting oeuvre of which the highlights, apart from Cork Cathedral, were the exotic interiors for Lord Bute at Carlisle Castle and Castlet Cocho; two exquisite Yorkshire churches for Lord Ripon; his own towered house in Melbury Road, Kensington; and a quantity of elaborate painted furniture, stained glass, metalwork and jewellery. It is on the basis of this output that Crook claims a position of towering eminence for his hero. From describing Burges "as the outstanding artist-architect of his generation" (page 174), he moves rapidly to the point (page 208) where he claims him as "the greatest architect of the Gothic Revival", an important shift which requires much justification. According to Crook, Burges is "the most dazzling exponent of the High Victorian Dream". Pugin conceived that dream, but never lived to see it; Rossetti and Burne-Jones painted it; Tennyson sang its glories; Ruskin and Morris formulated its philosophy; but only Burges built it. Only Burges? Surely architects such as Butterfield, Teulon, Godwin, Nesfield, Pearson, Brooks and, above all, Street have some claim to be considered as Burges's rivals if not equals.

The difficulty of setting Burges in perspective is greatly heightened by the absence of full and authoritative modern studies of Pugin and Street. It is conceivable that in the light of such studies, Burges might emerge not so much as "the greatest architect of the Gothic Revival", but as an aberration of genius. For all the magnificent detail and wealth of documentation with which Crook



Detail from a choir wall (c 1867) designed by William Burges for the Protestant Cathedral of St Fin Barre, Cork. The photograph is taken from the book reviewed here.

of Worcester College chapel, Oxford, could not be bettered. The story of St Paul's is equally well told. In 1861 Burges had remarked of the Cathedral that "the best thing would be to chisel off all the projections, mouldings, foliage, &c., everything in fact from the interior, and then cover it all over with painting, or better still, mosaic on a gold ground, like St Mark's... the upper storey [should be] taken down, so as to show the flying buttresses; while the sham lead dome being destroyed, the brick cone would be decorated like the dome at Chiaravalle, near Milan". Yet this was the man who, at the instigation of the ritualist priest led by Beresford-Hope, was invited ten years later to prepare a scheme for the decoration of the interior of the cathedral. His proposals, involving mosaic and majolica tiles, were accepted in 1874 though never executed. However, in the 1890s Sir William Richmond decorated the apse, sanctuary, choir and four crossing apses with mosaics according to a plan clearly derived from Burges. These, according to Crook, show that "Burges has been proved right, triumphantly right".

The chapter on "Gothic" is appropriately the longest in the book: "For Burges Gothic meant above all, Early French: that noblest and truest of styles". The stage is set with Burges's winning designs of 1856 for Lillie Cathedral which marked the shift in English Victorian architecture from Decorated to Early French Revival. Though Burges's design was unexecuted, many of its features appeared in subsequent commissions. At Waltham Abbey, Essex, he provided a massive new east end which Pevsner characterized as an example of "robust ugliness" but of which Crook writes: "At Waltham, Burges does not copy. He meets the Middle Ages as an equal. Unbelievably, the current guide book fails even to mention his name".

The beautifully written account of Burges's two Anglican churches in Yorkshire is one of the high points in the book: "in site, massing and compositional effect", Crook explains, "both churches could hardly be more different. Skelton is Picturesque; Studley Royal approaches the Sublime". The churches have a curious origin, being commissioned in 1870 by the 1st Marquess of Ripon, who became a Catholic in

1874, by Lady Mary Vyner and by Lady Ripon, who were in search of a pious use for the unspent ransom money connected with the murder of Frederick Vyner by Greek brigands. Stranger architecturally was Burges's unexecuted design for Bombay School of Art with its conically-domed multi-chimneyed smithy, modelled on the Benedictine kitchen at Marmoutier as illustrated by Viollet-le-Duc and Lenoir. Burges's relation to Viollet is a topic on which Crook might have enlarged, especially in view of the central importance which Eastlake accords Viollet in his *History of the Gothic Revival* (1872). Burges's plans for Trinity College, Hartford, Connecticut, were executed only in modified form, while his fantastic yet influential designs for the Law Courts in the Strand were rejected in favour of Street's noble and more realistic project.

In the final chapter, "Feudal", Crook gives a complete and sympathetic account of Burges's work at Cardiff Castle, Castlet Cocho and Mount Stuart for the 3rd Marquess of Bute, richest and strangest of all Victorian patrons of architecture. It is most surprising that despite his position as a millionaire convert to the Catholic church, Bute never employed Burges to build a major Catholic church. He differs so strikingly in this respect from other leading Catholic peers in the nineteenth century like the 16th Earl of Shrewsbury and the 14th and 15th Dukes of Norfolk, that it is an aspect of his character worthy of more exploration.

The chapters on Burges's life and career have been faultlessly researched and presented so that there are very few errors: Disraeli's *Coningsby* was not dedicated to "Thomas Hope of Deepdene" but to his son Henry Hope; the phrase "T. Honey at Dunleavy" refers to the architect Timothy Hevey working at Dunleavy, Co. Donegal; the quotation from *The Ordeal of Gilbert Finfold* is not quite accurate; *loggia* is mis-spelt on pages 147 and 162, and *Gaol* on page 167. The Rev. J. Yattman is disgracefully referred to as "the Rev. Yattman" on pages 250 and 406. However, Dr Crook has written a learned, personal and allusive book which answers most of the questions about Burges while posing many others about the nature of romanticism and of the complex cultural history of nineteenth-century England.

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## Author, Author

Readers are invited to identify the sources of the three quotations which follow and to send us the answers so that they reach this office not later than Friday, August 7. A prize of £10 is offered for the first correct set of answers to be opened, or failing that the most nearly correct - in which case inspired guesswork will also be taken into consideration.

Entries should be addressed to the Editor, The Times Literary Supplement, P.O. Box 7, New Printing House Square, Gray's Inn Road, London WC1X 8EZ, and marked "Author, Author" on the envelope. The solution and result will appear in our issue of August 14.

## Competition No 58

- 1 Lords are lordliest in their wine.
- 2 Most lords are feeble and forlorn.
- 3 We have many sorts of lord in our country: lords haughty, who think that commoners all seek their acquaintance and must be kept at a distance; lords affable, who like mixing with their fellow-men of all degrees and know the conventions of good society by which introductions are effected; lords lavish and leisurely and dead-broke lords eager to earn an honest living. In Lord - we see the lord predatory. He appears to think that his barony gives him the right to a seat at the dinner-table in any private house in the kingdom.

Fear of this lord is clearly the beginning of wisdom.

## Result of Competition No 56

Winner: Jean E. Elliott, 180 Ashley Gardens, Emery Hill Street, London SW1P 1PD.

## Answers:

- 1 Give Dayrolles a chair.
- 2 This hath not offended the king.
- 3 God bless you, my dear.

— Last words of Dr Johnson (to Miss Morris, who had come to ask his blessing);

2 With a flat in Chelsea of a bogus elegance, and books puffed by Gollancz, With a degree of complacency which nothing could evince, And without one sole well-wisher to kick him in the pants... - William Plomer, "Father and Son: 1939"

3 To thee, with hope and terror dumb, The unfledged MS. authors come; Thous printest all - and sellest some - My Murray, - Byron, "To Mr. Murray"

Result of Competition No 56 Winner: Jean E. Elliott, 180 Ashley Gardens, Emery Hill Street, London SW1P 1PD.

Answers:

1 Give Dayrolles a chair.

2 This hath not offended the king.

— Last words of Dr Johnson (to Miss Morris, who had come to ask his blessing);

With surrealist pictures, and books puffed by Gollancz, With a degree of complacency which nothing could evince, And without one sole well-wisher to kick him in the pants... - William Plomer, "Father and Son: 1939"

3 To thee, with hope and terror dumb, The unfledged MS. authors come; Thous printest all - and sellest some - My Murray, - Byron, "To Mr. Murray"

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# An awareness of delight

By Jonathan Barker

CHARLES TOMLINSON:

The Flood

55pp. Oxford University Press.  
£3.95.  
0 19 211944 3

The Flood is Charles Tomlinson's tenth book of poems, his first *Relations and Continuities* being published exactly thirty years ago. These ten books contain over four hundred poems. In addition to this output, Tomlinson has since the late 1960s produced paintings and graphic works in great profusion. (The only book so far of the graphic works, *In Black and White*, 1976, contained small-scale reproductions and there is need of another, larger format volume.)

Tomlinson's work as a poet has developed with a steady, meticulous and startlingly consistent assurance. His first book contained only one poem which he felt worth preserving in his *Selected Poems 1951-1974* but that one is recognizably his. It describes a horse-driven float in terms of sound (the horse's hooves breaking "clean and frost-sharp on the untopped ear") and sight ("The hooves describe an arabesque on space"). Tomlinson went on to produce memorable books at both ends of the 1960s. *Seeing Is Believing* (1960) contains his famous rejection of Symbolism in the poem "Antecedents": "the shut cell of that solitude" is seen as a view of life too subjective to allow accurate contemplation of the outside world. Tomlinson's personal poetic of thinking and feeling with the eye was an attempt to break free from what he saw as the neo-Romantic view of the poet: it was as if he needed to write a poetry which respected objects as things with their own independent life. *The Way of a World* (1969), surely Tomlinson's most impressive single book, combined his passion and respect for language as a means of precisely exploring the world with his equal passion and respect for objects outside ourselves. This produced a mastery title poem: "we grasp/The way of a world in the seed, the gulf/swayed toiling against the two/Gravities that root and uproot the trees."

*The Way In* (1974) introduced Tomlinson's personal history with "At Stoke", an autobiographical piece that also provides insight into the poems and the graphic works: "I have lived in a single landscape. Every tone/And turn have had for their ground/These beginnings in grey/black". The printed poems had always naturally enough used black ink on white paper, but eventually this colour, or lack of colour, extended to the black gouache of Tomlinson's graphic works. These are executed in asotic black, white and grey and create imaginary worlds and chance relationships between images. The fact that Tomlinson's visual education took place in the industrial landscape of Stoke ("This place the first to seize on my heart and eye/Has been their hombook and their history") may not be beside the point here. The sense of his urban roots is stressed in a poem called "The Lasson" (included in Tomlinson's new book, *The Flood*), on the Gloucestershire countryside: "I still keep the eye of a newcomer/a townsman's eye". Even though he has lived in the countryside for twenty years, his outsider's eye ensures that everything he sees is continually revalued.

Tomlinson's central themes have always been sensation and the mind examining sensations in relation to natural phenomena. Once we grasp this we can see that the chief poetic precursor of Tomlinson is not Wallace Stevens, William Carlos Williams or Giuseppe Ungaretti (although their techniques have influenced him considerably), but the William Wordsworth who talked of nature "feelingly watched" and who was able to watch a butterfly for half an hour so as to discover whether it slept or fed.

The Flood is different to the five books which have preceded it in one very noticeable way. Instead of arranging the poems by theme, the book moves apparently chronologically through the poet's travels. The sequence of places seems to be: Gloucestershire, North America, Italy and back to Gloucestershire again. The forms of the poems change with the locations. The Gloucestershire poems are generally longer, utilizing an meditative and fluid unrhymed run-on line. The poems set in New Mexico or other parts of the United States tend to be shorter travel snapshots (the titles are often place-names, as in a travel diary), and the topics touched on include the decline of the power of tribal spirits in Jemez, the cries of the eagle dancers at Cochiti, divers at San Francisco, and the noises of the frogs in Poughkeepsie, NY. The poems lead naturally from one to the next, the link being as he moves from the snow of the first poem through the desert garden in New Mexico to the tributary of the River Severn which dominates the final poems.

These travel poems could possibly be used as evidence to support the traditional complaint (usually made by those who later admit to not having read much of his work) that Tomlinson does not write directly about what Robert Frost called "inner weather". But to Tomlinson whatever happens around him defines his inner nature: he discovers the world through his relationship to it. "Touch taught the body how to go/Through straight places. Nothing too steep/Or narrow now, once mind and muscle/Learned to dance their balancings . . .". Hence Tomlinson's need to record clearly what he sees and experiences without moving directly into the limelight.

The Flood contains a great variety of poems, among them the very personal elegy "For Miriam", the unashamed prose passage "The Near and the Far", the humorous "Albuquerque", in which a cinema built in the same year as the birth of the poet is being restored - "I am alone already" the poem ends; "Prologue Note", on a musical concert (it is the latest in a series of poems by Tomlinson on music, "the wholly imaginary passion" as he calls it); a narrative poem for Charles Olson; and the strange little poem "Parsnips", which sees parsnips as "this image of perfection". Cézanne commented similarly on carrots; and Cézanne and Tomlinson are alike in their ability to look at familiar things in a new way.

But the best and most essentially Tomlinsonian poems in *The Flood* are those gathered towards the end of the book and set "beside a stream in Gloucestershire", as home is described in a touching personal and public poem, "Instead of an Essay", addressed to Donald Davie. Davie,

the first and surely still with Michael Schmidt the best critic and champion of Tomlinson's poems, is called "Brother in a mystery you trace/To God. I to an awareness of delight/cannot name". This delight in the act of sensually experiencing the world is an aspect of Tomlinson's poetry which has been curiously understressed by critics.

The title poem is a personal meditation on the night the "stream in Gloucestershire" rose violently during rain and flooded the poet's home. (The cover of the book shows a detail of Leonardo's "The Deluge"). The almost symbolic water of the river, and the stone of the house once "perfectly reconciled" side by side with it, are incongruously mixed when the river floods. Stone, "the image of a constancy", becomes "as porous as a sponge", although "the walls held"; meanwhile the "we" of the poem sleep upstairs, hung "between a dream of fear and the very final poem in the book, "The Epilogue". Characteristically "The Flood" ends with the poet's pleasure one morning when he sees his flooded rooms downstairs, where reflections of water and light dance "in whorls on every ceiling" and produce "this vertigo of sunbeams everywhere". Sight overcomes everything else as the poet pauses "to praise the shimmer". Seeing is believing in deed; and daylight enables the poet

to hack down a bank so that water can return to the river.

"The Epilogue" is an extraordinary poem, a rare but not unique example of Tomlinson using the surreal or "so real", as he punningly and tellingly calls it elsewhere. The inner world of imagination is usually the domain of his graphic works, but here chance and dream enter a poem in which the possible death of "Myself and you" under an apocalyptic tidal wave is averted when the poet wakes from nightmare to the real world and its sounds. "Caught back from epilogue to epilogue" the poem ends - the first epilogue being the possible end of the world, the second and more immediate ending being that of the book. "The Epilogue" is also, of course, the epilogue to the poem "The Flood": in both it is the world of light, and the sight and sounds of morning, which dismiss fear felt at night.

In his best poems, and I am inclined to include the title poem of his new book among them, Tomlinson achieves the very thing that he once praised John Constable for doing: "for what he saw/Discovered what he was, and the hand - unswayed/by the dictation of a single sense - /Bodied the accurate and total knowledge/in a calligraphy of present pleasure". Pleasure is indeed the word to end on: if not his best book, *The Flood* is certainly one of Tomlinson's most varied and rewarding.

successful poems, there as elsewhere, were personal ones, examining the tensions between the pain of separation from his wife and from normal human living and his open-eyed, unaggressive commitment to the war. He did not speak only for himself. His tender, painful poem "Goodbye" must have haunted many couples separated by events.

The selection is by the poet's widow together with Jeremy Hooker, who contributes a perceptive "Afterword". The layout of the book is cramped and a little distracting, but with publishing in its current state expectations in this respect, and be grateful merely to see these poems in print once again.

"Psychobiography" is an established critical genre (Roger Poole's *The Unknown Virginia Woolf* provides a sinister example, Paul Delany's book on Lawrence and the Great War a very persuasive one) and Ford, like Conrad (Moser's last subject), particularly invites such treatment. His mixed nationality, his Pre-Raphaelite childhood, his messy, tormented love-affairs, his quixotic (especially with Conrad), his nervous disorders, his war experience, his brilliant editing of the *English Review*, his discovery of his own life, his Catholicism, vanity, scepticism, "sentimental Torism", above all his seeming to stand so expressively for the passing of the Edwardian age: these things are necessarily involved in our reading of his fiction. Especially when so little of it is, in fact, read. The "psychobiographer" may well be in a better position than the textual analyst to explain why Ford spent twenty-four years trying to write *The Good Soldier*, and why so much of what came before and after has been submerged. Of well over seventy books, I suppose that *The Good Soldier*, *Parade's End* (often without *Last Post*), *The Fifth Queen*, *Romance* (written with Conrad), and bits of the marvellous travel writing, memoirs and criticism are now all that are widely read. Novels such as *Mr. Apollo*, *A Call, Ladies Whose Bright Eyes*, *The New Humpty-Dumpty*, or *Henry for Hugh*, with Ford's poetry, his fairy tales, war-writing and pantomime, are the specialist's or connoisseur's preserve. Thomas Moser reads all of Ford, *con amore*, but he knows very well that some do not.

But even a limited reading of Ford will imply display the polished, minute prose, and his recurrent preoccupations: his romantic feeling for the English landlord class, for Providence, for Catholic medievalism; his tragic belief in idealism and passion; his obsession, like Conrad, with doubles, "secret sharers"; his infirm neurotic heroes and destructive women; his sense that "we mortal millions live alone"; and his longing for peace: "I must have a bit of rest, you know".

Moser's labour of love (he describes his man as "strange, lovable, brilliant, unhappy, joyous, generous and altogether wonderful") is to explain the persistence of these "Fordian" features, and hence Ford's creative imagination. Ford's emergent psychology is formed by the influence of Rossetti ("obsessive concern with passion"), a belief that "passion brings death", and of Ford's grandfather, Ford Madox Brown (altruism, idealism, manliness: Ford's "other side"). Ford's father, Hueffer, who called his

# The Good Soldier out of uniform

By Hermione Lee

THOMAS C. MOSER:

The Life in the Fiction of Ford Madox Ford

349pp. Princeton University Press.  
\$29.50.  
0 691 06445 8

"I don't know that an analysis of my own personality matters at all to this story," says Dowell at the start of Part III of *The Good Soldier*, a moment after accounting for himself with "it is as if one had a dual personality". The two remarks are crucial: of course Dowell's psychology "matters" in the saddest story, indeed it is the story; and it is most characteristically revealed here. Dowell's sense of double-ness, his not knowing himself or others, his process of discovery, which constantly imply a terrible darkness and silence just beyond the wry, bemused, plangent narrative, are at once the technique, the plot and the subject of *The Good Soldier*. This is Ford's most successful expression of his own personality and of his belief in impressionism as a literary method.

Thomas Moser, sleuth, analyst and impressionistic critic, is convinced that Ford's psychology "matters", and he pursues "the life in the fiction" in order to establish at once the meaning of the work and the nature of the man. If Ford called his memoirs and autobiographies "novels" (and they certainly fictionalized life) then his novels, Moser argues, can and should be read as autobiographies.

This highly coloured, highly speculative emotional graph of Ford's life is painstakingly applied to all the works. Ford's neuroathetic symptoms (agoraphobia, suicidal depression, amnesia) are related to his techniques: persuasively so, since a fear of vast unfriendly spaces and a longing for oblivion inform the relatively unimportant, impressionistic processes not only of Ford but also of Conrad and Virginia Woolf. Every novel is mined for its Fordian neurotic hero, its Fordian English aristocrat, its formidable father figure, its Conradian sceptical, foreign writer, its vengeful, dominant Elsie/Violet-woman, and permutations of these figures. Ford's inconsistencies about dates in his novels, and his free handling of facts in his memoirs are cunningly traced to their psychological sources. Moser's thoroughness is daunting; no possible complexity escapes him: "If Ford, in 1924, makes the bad Conrad into Macmaster, he converts the good Conrad into what he has made of himself - Marwood." Here he proves that Mrs Caroline Marwood (as well as Violet Hunt) is Leonora Ashburnham:

Like Leonora with Dowell, she treated her husband as if he were an invalid. As Leonora takes over the management of Branshaw Telegraph, so Caroline had the sole responsibility of running Water Farm. As Leonora rides about Hampshire in a dogcart, so is Caroline remembered, in a dogcart, in Kent. As Leonora, a couple of years after Edward's death, marries her old admirer, the neighboring farmer Rodney Bayham, so Caroline, two years after Marwood's death and three years after *The Good Soldier*, was to marry their old farmer-friend and neighbor, Walter Pilcher - another of Ford's uncanonized prophecies? Even more uncanonized, Leonora Ashburnham Bayham becomes pregnant, and Caroline Marwood Pilcher adopted a child.

This way madness lies. To "prove" that a character "is" a person on the basis of what afterwards happens to that person is a bizarre undertaking; and it's not the only way in which Moser's compulsive commitment to source-hunting is disconcerting. One of the book's liabilities is that, necessarily, it relies heavily on Arthur Mizener's biography of 1971, though Moser often disagrees with Mizener's interpretations. Moser is sometimes obscure without the help of *The Saddest Story*. When Moser mentions "Ford's attempts in May 1909 to send Willa Cather to call on an outraged Conrad", we need Mizener to explain that Conrad resented Ford's Americanizing of the *English Review* (Ford hoped to

persuade McClure, through Cather, to finance it). When Moser refers to Ford's "own, brief, horrendous experiences close to the front" in 1916, we need Mizener for the full story of Ford's concussion, his damaged teeth, and his loss of memory. Perhaps this dependency does not matter - after all, Moser is not writing another biography - but it can be frustrating.

More disturbingly, Moser's idea of Ford leads to some distortion. It was typical of Ford, Moser says acutely, to "rearrange" or "eliminate" the "recalcitrant elements" of his life. The "psychobiographer" embarks on an analogous process. Not enough weight is given to the more public side of Ford - his political thinking, his editorial work, his attention to detail, his critical judgements to the footnotes awkwardly, for instance, the confident denial of any homosexual element in the Conrad-Marwood-Ford triangle (a vital, and controversial, point) tucked away in a discreet note; why should Moser's fulsome praise of *Providence* ("a beautiful, engaging, noble, and timely book") not be asserted in the main text?

Frank McConnell's book, one of the first in a series intended to offer a criticism of science fiction that is "serious in its standards and its concern for literary value", has little to say about Wells's scientific fiction. We find attempts to put a rather later date on his transformation from artist into prophet, and to see his science fiction writing as a whole as having greater intellectual and artistic coherence than has generally been attributed to it.

McConnell's claims for Wells, in fact, go considerably beyond the widespread acceptance of him as the greatest of science fiction writers, for he wishes to see him as "one of the strongest essential writers of our era . . . a writer whose real time has not yet come, but is coming." He is a writer with "two voices": "the scientific analysis of cosmic futurity, and the middle-class absurd but admirable insistence on the possibility of hope, the power of Will . . . [who] remained faithful, in his way, to both voices."

The continuity in Wells's science fiction, then, develops out of the interplay between these two perspectives, with now one, now the other, achieving a temporary dominance, and neither ever completely victorious or completely absent. The early despair at man's misuse of his intellectual and scientific abilities gives way overall (but never exclusively) to the *willed* belief that, with energetic and thoughtful effort, the dream of human progress and improvement might yet be salvaged. Human perversity and pettiness are not easily eradicated, however, and they remain for Wells perpetual threats to the implementation of the highest ideals - as *The Food of the Gods* (that curious and neglected ancestor of Stapledon's *Odd John*, Van Vogt's *Slan* and so many other *Urbemensch* stories) makes clear. Meanwhile McConnell attempts to rebut the charges that Wells's perfect society would be little more than a superficially benign totalitarianism by claiming that there is a genuine nobility of vision behind it and a subtle understanding of the nature of social and individual freedom. Moreover, he was always fully aware that he was creating *fiction* and that the "distorting" lens of the "fiction" was directed at the present as much as at the future.

McConnell's presentation of this aspect of Wells (which is much more complex than this summary can suggest) is convincing to the extent that it allows us to look at the critically neglected scientific romance of 1904 in a fresh and revealing way and to find virtues in *The Food of the Gods*, *A Modern Utopia*, and in *The Days of the Comet* that the standard presentations of Wells overlook. Even McConnell, however, is forced to acknowledge that, for the Wells of the 1920s and later, "the role of social prophet did supervene over that of novelist, and particularly of scientific romancer", and, though a continuity of vision may persist, the imaginative presentation of this suffers as a result. Only the little-known *San Begotten*, Wells's last scientific romance, comes in for a few kind words as "a graceful, immensely good-humoured, and oddly moving little parable," though some favourable attention is also paid to both the written and filmed versions of *The Shape of Things to Come*.

The main originality of McConnell's book is to be found in its treatment of the later, less familiar works and it is to be hoped that it might prompt a reappraisal of the value of at least some of them. The earlier chapters, which deal with Wells's life, his intellectual background (especially the debt to Darwinism which remained a guiding principle - to be argued with as well as accepted - throughout his career) and the better known romances, covers more heavily trodden ground, though McConnell is always lucid and intelligent and the book as a whole will be useful to the student audience for whom it, and the series it belongs to, is presumably intended.

Some day, however, someone will have to come to grips with Wells's fiction as a whole, avoiding the almost exclusive attention to either the scientific romances or the realistic novels that has been common with critics until now. Wells, who excelled in both types of fiction, is probably the ideal figure through whom the still controversial questions of the nature and literary value of science fiction as compared to mainstream fiction could be examined; and when McConnell, in a tantalizingly compressed discussion of *Tono-Bungay* refers to it as "a rich and intricate novel", which is "close to being Wells's best narrative performance", it is clear that only a more sustained investigation of the interplay between the various strands of Wells's fiction could fully justify the claims made for his greatness as a writer.

# Progress and pettiness

By Graham Petrie

FRANK MCCONNELL:

The Science Fiction of H. G. Wells  
235pp. Oxford University Press.  
£11.50 (paperback, £2.75).  
0 19 502811 2

The vision of H. G. Wells as the apostle of a crass and mindless worship of science and technology, the indefatigably bouncy creator of soulless utopias run on vaguely fascist lines by an elite group of smug technocrats, is less popular today than it used to be, though the prospect of it is still to be found in the most unexpected places. Since the appearance of Bernard Bergonzi's invaluable *The Early H. G. Wells* in 1961, it has become difficult to ignore the often terrifying blackness and pessimism of works like *The Time Machine*, *The War of the Worlds*, and *The Island of Dr. Moreau*; while the title of Wells's last published book, *Mind at the End of Its Tether*, suggests the exact opposite of the breezy optimism so often attributed to him. The books produced in the long period of forty years between these two extremes, however, still pose problems, and the science fiction titles among them in particular have received relatively little critical attention (though almost all of them have been reprinted in paperback at one time or another over the last decade). A more sophisticated view of Wells, and probably the dominant one today, is to see him as the creator, at the very beginning of his career, of some half-dozen brilliant and seminal "scientific romances", who then broke faith with his artistic imagination to take on the role of self-appointed prophet, producing one-dimensional blueprints for a future that few readers could contemplate without dismay, or even abhorrence.

This position, though slightly fairer to Wells, still has many disadvantages. It presupposes an extremely sudden artistic collapse (from the widely admired *First Men in the Moon* in 1901 to the rarely read *The Food of the Gods* and *A Modern Utopia* in 1904 and 1905 respectively), and it fails to explain how Wells could nevertheless go on to produce a series of realistic novels (starting with *Love and Mr. Lewisham* in 1900), that display, to put it mildly, considerable fictional skills. Though

Surtees and syntax, *The Sporting Magazine*, volumes of pictured fish and brilliant birds, and sets in tree-calf with the crest in gold . . .

The woman's tenaciousness is subtly underlined by her tragic awareness of its futility; her implied knowledge that what she catalogues will soon be prefaced not by her own "Quod habeo tenes" but by a poet's *Ubi Sunt*.

Good with his hands, but nothing definite, fixed up some tricky switches for the light, built his own graceless desk and shelves of deal.

On the Parish Council; sidestepped at the church . . .

The theme of possessions being transferred, lost, or desperately clung to, and attendant interests both in things antique and in the process of ageing, are perhaps inevitable consequences of a life spent dealing in objects that outlive their owners. In "The Contents of the Mansion" a woman, the last of her line, catalogues her possessions with a gusto in keeping with her family's motto, "What I have, I hold".

A gentleman's library. Behind glazed doors,

# In the Swindon tradition

James Lasdun

JOAN BARTON:

A House Under Old Sarum  
New and Selected Poems  
80pp. Cornwall: Harry Chambers/  
Pelterio Press. £3.  
0 905291 32 8

Joan Barton began publishing poetry in the late 1920s, under the encouragement of Walter de la Mare. A desire to be lyrical, and a distinctive English habit of mind (wistful feeling for the countryside, and a quiet, very C of E religious conviction), seem to have drawn her naturally towards the non-European, non-Modernist English tradition of Hardy and de la Mare himself. Her early work is frequently reminiscent of those poets in substance, tone, and above all rhythm:

I shall not forget that place  
Where the dead were:  
Only the rain, the rain.  
No one said,  
None with me when I found  
The church in its fallow ground . . .  
It is not difficult to see why Philip Larkin, who has always championed the Hardy-esque, included Joan Barton in *The Oxford Book of Twentieth Century English Verse*.

What this new collection reveals, however, is that Joan Barton is at her best when she is at her least lyrical. She seldom attains the compactness of perception, suggestion

and formal organization that a memorable lyric requires, and although there is always a residue of genuine poetry in even her most diffuse pieces of lyricism her real gifts lie elsewhere, in a gift that inclines towards the novelistic. The best poems in *A House Under Old Sarum* are the narratives and dramatic monologues. Joan Barton's career as a bookseller seems to have brought her into contact with the kind of oddball characters who make natural subjects for narrative verse: characters like the compulsive self-educator in "A Passion for Knowledge in North Wiltshire" - "A man in a Swindon tradition - / Evening Institute - / Working Men's college/ Had been made for him." - or the subject of "The Major" - An Epitaph:

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The theme of possessions being transferred, lost, or desperately clung to, and attendant interests both in things antique



# Nonconformity in Normandy

By R. J. Knecht

PHILIP BENEDICT:  
Rouen during the Wars of Religion  
297pp. Cambridge University Press.  
£24.  
0 521 22818 2

One of the central problems facing historians of the Reformation is where to ascribe responsibility for the political upheavals generated by that movement both nationally and locally. In recent years the process has been illuminated in respect of Germany. The response of various cities to the Reformation has been shown to depend on an infinitely variable admixture of factors - political, social and economic - not simply on the whim of a ruler; the importance of the role played by the whole urban community has been amply demonstrated. Until recently, however, no attempt had been made to apply the same kind of research to sixteenth-century France. Scholars have been content to treat the Wars of Religion there as a mere reflection of the tensions and conflicts within the court and aristocracy. Not even the *Annales* school has corrected this limited view: contempt for *l'histoire événementielle* has deflected it from such a task. Yet, as Philip Benedict argues, "political events within a given society; they show what values were considered sufficiently important to be worth struggling for; and they reveal the social grievances which moved people to action".

For obvious documentary reasons urban history offers the best chance of illuminating the Wars of Religion by applying the methodology of the structuralists to the study of past events. Rouen, as the second city of France (Francis I even described it as the first on the ground that Paris was not a city but a province!) played an important role in the civil wars, sending more religious exiles to Geneva than any other French town. Unfortunately, its records for the sixteenth century, though plentiful, do not permit a precise statistical evaluation of the social composition of the Protestant community. Dr Benedict has had to rely on four partial lists of Huguenots for the period 1550-72 and on the membership rolls of the General Confraternity of the Holy Sacrament, a body dedicated to upholding the Catholic faith. His conclusions reveal how simplistic was Hauser's contention that "in Rouen in 1560 the working man's cause and the cause of the Reform were one and the same". The Protestant congregation recruited its members from all social classes except the lowest: sub-artisanal groups, such as street-sweepers, remained solidly Catholic. At the upper end of the social scale, office-holders tended to be Catholic as did the wealthiest merchants and members of trades concerned with food and drink. Otherwise all social groups were represented among the Protestants, though some proportionately more than others. Luxury trades, for example, and occupations requiring a fair measure of literacy were particularly well represented. Oddly

enough, considering the important part played by aristocratic women in the French Reformation, there were relatively more men than women among the Rouen Protestants. Despite their minority status, the Protestants gained control of Rouen at the start of the first civil war, but they were soon ousted by the king's army and the Catholics restored to power. Yet the Protestant congregation survived, and after the peace of 1563 serious outbreaks of violence between the two religious groups developed, culminating in the massacre of St Bartholomew's Day. This has long been regarded by historians as a major turning-point in the course of the French Reformation, but its long-term impact has seldom been measured statistically. Benedict shows that in Rouen, where the massacre occurred almost one month after the Parisian one, it precipitated a huge wave of defections. The Catholic parish registers reveal a flood of acts in which young Abrahams, Isaacs and Saras (names hitherto favoured by Protestants) ranging in age from one to twelve were "re-baptized". Other Huguenots flocked to the cathedral, where they submitted to formal abjuration. The massacre, in short, was followed by a dramatic collapse of the Reformed congregation: from around 16,500 in 1565 it fell to between 1,500 and 3,000. What is more, this decline was permanent. Even after the Edict of Nantes the Protestant church in Rouen never regained its size of the mid-1560s. This was not the result of forcible conversions, but rather of despondency and disillusion.

All the high hopes entertained by Protestants in the early 1560s were now dashed and many must have decided that conformity or emigration was preferable to leading a dangerous life in the service of a lost cause. Following the massacre, Rouen settled down to a quiet and prosperous existence until the crisis of the Holy League reawakened religious militancy. Benedict cannot throw much light on the means by which the League gained control of the city in 1588, but within the limits set by his evidence he demonstrates that the local *ligueurs* were not identical with the revolutionaries in Paris or Dijon. They were drawn almost exclusively from "the very highest strata of society", several of them being old-established *parlementaires*. The principal novelty of the revolution was the inclusion of four clerics among the twelve *ligueurs* chosen to administer the city. Thus the League in Rouen did not produce any radical transformation of the social complexion of the city's government. But it did signify a new conception of its authority: "in place of men whose power was legitimized by custom and precedent and derived ultimately from a king who in turn received his power from God, there now ruled men whose authority was sanctioned by the people and sanctified by commitment to a holy crusade".

One of the most interesting chapters in Benedict's important book is concerned with the spiritual upsurge that accompanied the League. As he rightly indicates,

modern students of the League are usually more interested in those aspects which foreshadow later revolutions: its doctrine of popular sovereignty and its popular radicalism. But the movement cannot be completely understood without taking into account its impulse towards communal purification. In Rouen, this stood in marked contrast to the essentially negative attitude of the ecclesiastical authorities to the Protestant challenge during the first decades of the Religious Wars. Now, four important religious initiatives were taken: the *oratoire* was introduced, confraternities of Penitents established, a Jesuit college founded and an attempt made to bring in the Carmelites. At the same time there was much processional activity.

But were the sentiments of the bulk of the population reflected in this devotional activity? Benedict answers this question with the help of quantification. An examination of baptismal registers in two sets of parish records that under the League sexual abstinence during Lent (which the church had long recommended) spread to the poorer parishes whereas, previously it had been observed only in the wealthier ones. This trend coincided also with a sharp increase in the amount of pious offerings deposited in the basins of parish churches. But religious enthusiasm was short-lived: as the war dragged on and as the economic crisis which it provoked deepened, support for the League steadily waned. By the time Henry of Navarre announced his conversion to Catholicism, the Rouennais, it seems, had lost their crusading zeal.

and thus ensured its survival well into the nineteenth century.

The commercial economy of the region depended crucially on a surplus of grain for export; textiles (declining), shipbuilding (expanding), and fishing (static) were of negligible importance by comparison. The surpluses extracted by the landlords and the Church were directed to other markets by the merchants of Vannes, shackled to this precarious trade by their failure to compete effectively against their more prosperous neighbours of Nantes and Lorient. The merchants were outweighed in town affairs by the large numbers of resident or semi-resident nobles, the officials and lawyers, and the clergy. The diocese seems to have been peopled by educated and serious priests, mostly local men, who enjoyed good relations with their flocks so long as they refrained from attacking entrenched local customs, or stepping outside their recognized role in the community.

In the course of a subtle and detailed investigation of the relationship between these and other factors Le Goff demonstrates that conflict and movement did exist beneath the apparently placid surface of Vannetais life. At a political level this was naturally concentrated in Vannes itself, where the monarchy's problems with Brittany as a whole helped to polarize town politics. The active members of the local bourgeoisie, increasingly frustrated by the intervention of nobles and clerics in town affairs out of selfish or external motives, were to form the basis of the "patriot" party at the outset of the Revolution. Le Goff inverts Augustin Cochin's interpretation of this respect, arguing convincingly that "1789 was the revenge of the politicians on the dilettantes". Even in Vannes, however, this "patriot" group was never more than an active minority; in the surrounding countryside the revolutionary government was soon to be the object of sullen and enduring hostility. Le Goff is rightly unconvinced by the contemporary explanation in terms of petty clerical influence, and emphasizes instead the ways in which the "reforms" after 1789 brought more disadvantages than benefits to both substantial peasants and poor.

seems again to have been the peculiarities of the *domaine congeable*, above all, which prevented the emergence of a strong group of small to middling land-holders with a vested interest in the new order. Any isolated rural radical must have expected a rough time, for, as the author shows, this was not a society in which one was wise to be too different.

Using the criminal records, he argues that the *bourgeois* had a far more intense social life than has sometimes been suggested, and one marked by a good deal of conflict and violence. In this relatively poor society tiny questions of economic advantage might start serious feuds, as might the insults with which people seem to have been so ready. Other quarrels were more obviously grave, such as those arising from competition for tenancies, while all were encouraged by an already impressive habit of rural drunkenness, in one of the classic regions of French alcoholism. This is one of the most compelling parts of the book, and one would have welcomed more on the subject. For example, Professor Le Goff has little to say on informal mechanisms for settling disputes outside the courts.

In general, however, this sympathetic and scholarly book gives a remarkably full picture of life in this corner of Western France, and one which has a good deal to offer the more general historian.

The first issue of a new journal, *Parlements, Estates & Representation*, has appeared. Published twice yearly for the International Commission for the History of Representative and Parliamentary Institutions (subscription price £16 (US \$40)), it is edited by Dr John Register. The journal is concerned with political theory and the institutional practice of representation, as well as the internal organization and the social and political background to parliaments and assemblies of estates.

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# Holy Himalayan places

By John Crook

DAVID L. SNELLGROVE and  
TADEUSZ SKORUPSKI:  
The Cultural Heritage of Ladakh  
Volume 2: Zangskar and the Cave  
Temples of Ladakh  
166pp. Warminster: Aris and Phillips. £18.  
0 85668 148 2

With the international tourist season beginning again in Ladakh, and with Michel Peissel doubtless still gallivanting through the Himalayas in search of the last of the lost kingdoms of the mountains, it is a joy to have in one's hands a serious and scholarly treatment of the material culture of this remarkable region. Volume One of *The Cultural Heritage of Ladakh* (1977) covered the Indus valley area; the present volume examines the monastic and archaeological treasures of Zangskar, an exceptionally remote and mountain-locked valley with a long tradition of Tibetan Buddhism and a fascinating if obscure history. The book includes a brief account of small cave temples in Ladakh, and translations by Philip Denwood of important inscriptions at the old monastery of Alchi in central Ladakh. A biography of the important founder of several of the oldest monastic sites in Ladakh, Rin-chen bzang-po, is added together with the full Tibetan text. The book is fully illustrated.

When the Indian Government opened Ladakh to foreign visitors in 1974 David Snellgrove and Tadeusz Skorupski of the Tibetan Department of the School of Oriental and Asian Studies were quick to visit the area and scope the story of its archaeology and monastic culture before it could fall into less professional hands. These books have the nature of an extended but necessarily

provisional survey. In 1976 Skorupski visited Zangskar and (together with James Crowden whose account of his over-wintering experiences and descent of the Zangskar gorge in 1976-77 awaits publication) became the first serious western visitor to the region for many years.

Zangskar is famous in the Buddhist world because the great Naropa meditated in a cave there, and his disciple Marpa appears in local legends. Ladakhis of the Indus valley generally consider it a holy place. The first great western scholar of the Tibetan language, Cosma de Koros, worked there at Rumdum, Zangskar and Phuktal in the 1830s. The earliest archaeological descriptions were made by the Norwegian missionary A. H. Francke. Two small articles from the *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenlandischen Gesellschaft* (Vol. 61, n. 1, 1906) describe his visit but are not listed in the bibliography of the present work.

Readers of Professor Snellgrove's masterly books on Himalayan Buddhism may however be disappointed with this one. The text lacks his earlier style perhaps because of its collaborative authorship, and could have done with editing to achieve a better balance and relationship between the topics treated. Skorupski's account of his fascinating journey to Zangskar in 1976, before the road went in, seems deliberately flat in tone, and compared with Volume One dryness of the academic description often obscures the interest of a real-life adventure. The powerful atmosphere of many of these old monastic sites rarely comes across. Many of the site descriptions are mere catalogues of statues and paintings, giving little impression of their vivid impact. The quite extraordinary monastery of Phuktal, hanging from the lip of a vast cave among cliffs of a rocky gorge, gets only half a page and is illustrated by one poor photograph. Nor is it easy to relate the descrip-

tion of the Buddhist pantheon and its iconography to the illustrations in the text. Furthermore, the quality of the photographic printing leaves much to be desired.

Even so, the book's achievement is considerable and it must provide a basic text for anyone visiting the area with the intention of understanding what can be seen there. We have here in fact the first authoritative survey of some fourteen monasteries and temples containing treasures of the greatest interest. Several of the monasteries, notably Ringdun, Karsha and Phuktal, are sizeable establishments still recruiting their monks from local villages. They maintain the annual cycle of rituals and meditations characteristic of pre-1959 Tibet. Although, because they have broken off contact with the *Lhasa* of the old tradition, scholarship and philosophical understanding are now poor, steps are being taken to send some young monks to the newly established centres of Tibetan Buddhism in India. The quality of intellectual life in these old monasteries is thus likely to improve.

In Zangskar it is still possible to witness traditional Tibetan culture as it has been for many centuries - and it still takes a bold traveller to get there. Some of the monasteries are the "Brag-pa Bka-brgyud" order and try to maintain the meditative tradition of this sect, which was especially vibrant under the leadership of the great Lama Ngag-dban Tse-rin of rDzong-Khul monastery. A number of yogins still dwell in the mountains but poorly equipped western enthusiasts would be ill advised to set off looking for them.

The material culture of these sites is thus associated with a living tradition and forms an integral part of it. This book deals not with the products of a dead past but with the central symbolism of a people. It can therefore serve the valuable role of

introducing the modern traveller to an important living culture with significant messages for the world of today. A painstaking attempt to understand these monasteries is likely to be well repaid. The complexity of the iconography is considerable, however, and this volume provides a useful introduction, giving us not only a list of what is to be found and where but also at least the elements of an interpretive guide. For those interested in studies of a more social, religious or anthropological nature, such interpretation is also of major significance, for it can provide the key to understanding certain foundations of the Zangskar way of life.

Yet it must also be recognized that much of village life, including that of the monks themselves, is of a simplicity far removed from the towering edifices of the "great tradition" which the material culture on the monastery walls represents. The study of contemporary Zangskar is very much an attempt to comprehend the relationship between these two aspects of an ancient tradition. Snellgrove and Skorupski say little on the subject of villages but as guides to the walls they are valuable commentaries.

One especially valuable inclusion in this volume is the translation of the biography of Rin-chen bzang-po. Here is the authentic voice of a founding father. The monastery of Sumda, outside the main valley of Zangskar near central Ladakh, an ancient temple at Karsha and certain remains at Sani and Phuktal all date back to this time and are described here. The biography describes the life of this great translator, his journeys in India in search of teachings and scriptures, his work as a translator and his meetings with Naropa, the lama-chin Ye-shé-od of Guge and the philosopher Atisha. The text is important historically and amply and carefully annotated.

The book ends with Philip Den-

wood's translations of the inscriptions on the walls of the monastic buildings at Alchi. Alchi, described in Volume One, is the best preserved of the earlier monasteries and contains much of great value to art historians. Denwood's translations read like a fine piece of detective work: the often fragmentary and obscure inscriptions give clues to the almost unknown history of Ladakh in ancient times. A systematic study of such inscriptions elsewhere, and also on the mani walls scattered widely over the region, would clearly be a most worthwhile project.

A land of monasteries such as Zangskar is a repository of many treasures, not only because of the creation of monastic decorations and statues but also because through the centuries monks have returned there after studies in central Tibet bringing books and other religious objects. Many monastery possessions are only rarely on view. In 1980 the Dalai Lama visited Zangskar, and the monasteries put their valuable objects on show. At Phuktal fabulous tangkas festooned the walls of shrine-rooms for several days, only to be quickly hidden again. Access to such objects is very difficult because of their religious character; although, sadly, in some locations in Ladakh personal scruple has occasionally been overcome by the high value of such "antiques" in Western Europe. Travelling scholars will eventually be allowed to see and study more of such objects; but for this a close familiarity with individual monasteries and personal friendships with individuals will have to be established. The day of quick and cursory research visits will soon be over, but in the meantime we can be grateful for the valuable insights which such journeys have yielded. Of this kind of contemporary study the present volume is an important example.

# Bedrock in Brittany

By Robin Briggs

T. J. A. LE GOFF:  
Vannes and its Region  
A Study of Town and Country in  
Eighteenth-Century France  
445pp. Clarendon Press: Oxford  
1979. Pp. £25.  
0 19 822515 6

Like any good study of regional history under the Ancien Régime, T. J. A. Le Goff's book on Vannes in Brittany provokes reflection on the splendours et misères of the archival sources for the period. Immensely rich in some areas, impenetrably silent in others, it imposes a series of *corvées* on the conscientious historian, while demanding great ingenuity if the results are not to be as arid as the dusty papers from which they derive. Many readers will find some sections of this book hard going, for all the skill and thoughtfulness with which they are presented; those without experience of such work will probably not recognize the extent to

which the author has reified and shaped his recalcitrant material. In dealing with such questions as population mobility, marriage and holding, Professor Le Goff is careful to demonstrate the limitations, even contradictions, within his overall picture. He is writing about an area characterized above all by its static quality; in the Vannetais the eighteenth century saw only slight growth in either population or production, compared with many other regions of France. Even the Revolution failed to break the pattern, leaving behind it one of the most conservative regions of modern France. A deep analysis of the history of such regions clearly has an essential place in our understanding of French history; the lack of surface excitement may be compensated to some degree by the feeling of contact with the solid bedrock of rural society.

The economy and society of Vannes and the surrounding countryside were dominated by a group of structural elements, recognizable in varying forms across all of France. There were the structures of power:

law-courts, town councils, the bishopric and its officials, more occasionally provincial bodies such as the Estates or the *parlement* of Rennes, and their frequent opponents the royal *gouverneur* and *intendant*. Most of the small elite which dominated the region fitted somewhere into these organizations, if only in the form of noble membership of the Estates. In terms of land-holding the nobles were still predominant, despite a modest tendency for the bourgeoisie to buy up what little land came on the market. Much of the area operated the peculiar Breton system of land tenure known as *domaine congeable*. Le Goff argues convincingly that this averted the extreme polarization of peasant wealth found in many other regions, by maintaining a large number of middle-sized holdings over the generations. Neither landlords nor tenants break out of the system, which gave all parties a certain security. The revolutionary legislators in Paris, committed to the maintenance of private property, resisted optimistic attempts to classify it as a feudal abuse,

# Vanishing élites

By Robin Buss

JOHN E. COOKE:  
Georges Bernanos  
A Study in Christian Commitment  
197pp. Avebury. £10.  
0 85127 202 1

Like De Gaulle, who was at school with him in the 1890s, Georges Bernanos adhered to "une certaine idée de la France" which seems almost invariably at odds with the aspirations and behaviour of the modern inhabitants of that country. A man of the Right, sometimes obnoxiously so, he was passionate and violent polemicist who drew strength from opposition and, though the Church may claim him as a Catholic writer, his relationship with institutional Christianity was never an easy one: it is not hard to guess what he would have made of developments in it over the three decades since his death. His profound disgust with the

modern world would have made his message one of utter despair had he not believed in the salutary power of *élites*, and it is this aspect of his thought that John Cooke has chosen to analyse.

As he says, the *élite*ist solution was for Bernanos "an attractive method of reconciling vision and reality". The gap between the two is that between man's mystical perception of the implications of God's incarnation and his vain attempts to translate this into social and political terms. While the dichotomy between *mystique* and *politique* was not, in theory, insoluble, in practice it was only in such distant figures as Joan of Arc that Bernanos detected this balance between action and spirituality. His fictional characters, like Mouchette or the Curé d'Ambricourt, heroically confront a world devastated by Satan. De Gaulle, upholding in 1940 his concept of the honour of France, appeared for a time to rise to the same heroic stature; but Bernanos lived to see the postwar Gaullist government and

was disillusioned by it. When the *élite* became the *Majorité*, it inevitably fell from grace and it is hard to imagine that he would have had much time for the Gaullist Fifth Republic, which in reality enshrined the materialist bourgeois values he despised.

Mr Cooke is obviously sympathetic to Bernanos and sometimes too uncritical in his approach, but his work will be of undoubted value for students of modern French literature, particularly since nearly half of it consists in copious notes and bibliographies. There is no harm in letting Bernanos's ideas speak for themselves and leaving the reader to assess them; and there is a need for a study of him in English which is content largely to give a synthetic exposition of his thought. But Cooke fails to distinguish clearly enough between the quality of Bernanos's fictional characters and his polemical writings. With time, the latter have become interesting chiefly for their ferocity and the light they throw on the three or four great novels.

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In general, however, this sympathetic and scholarly book gives a remarkably full picture of life in this corner of Western France, and one which has a good deal to offer the more general historian.

# The sway of the Golden Stool

By J. B. Donne

M. D. McLEOD:  
The Asante  
192pp. British Museum Publications.  
£12.95. (paperback, £6.95)  
0 7141 1546 9

About the year 1700, Okomfo Anokye, the priest, magician and adviser to Osei Tutu, King of Asante, gathered together a great assembly in the capital city of Kumasi. He then caused to descend from the heavens before their eyes, in a black cloud, amidst rumbles of thunder, through air thick with white dust, a Golden Stool - that is to say, a carved wooden stool covered with gold foil - which proceeded to alight gently on the King's knees. Anokye informed the crowd that this stool enshrined the soul of the Asante people, and he commanded the King and all the chiefs and queen mothers to offer up hairs from the head and pubes, together with nail parings. These were ground up and made into a paste, some of which was drunk as a magical medicine while the rest was smeared on the Golden Stool. Thus the chiefs were united in one state, and Asante became for the next two hundred years the wealthiest and most powerful kingdom in West Africa after Benin (in modern Nigeria), until it was finally subjugated by the British and the King exiled to the Seychelles.

The more historians strive to sift out the true facts behind this story, the more the legendary and supernatural features become fixed in the popular mind. Certainly the Golden Stool exists, and on great occasions it is displayed in public, lying on its side on its own special chair or throne, in the shade of its own special umbrella. And it certainly brought unity to the Asante, which is all the more surprising when one considers the disunity which pre-

valled among so many other societies in West Africa, the deadly rivalry of chiefdoms, the internecine warfare of village against neighbouring village, which in some areas persisted well into the present century.

It is this great kingdom, and its religion and court and art, that Malcolm McLeod presents in *The Asante*, which serves as an accompaniment to the current Asante exhibition at the Museum of Mankind, of which he is Keeper. "It has been written," says McLeod in his preface, "for the general reader and attempts to show something of the complexity of Asante society and culture. Inevitably certain areas of Asante life cannot be examined in such a work: it has not been possible to discuss the elaborate and beautiful music of the Asante, nor their songs and poetry. . . . Attention has been confined to material culture and especially to the items used in political display in the last century." Indeed there is little that is original in the present work (for that one must seek out the many papers McLeod has published in out-of-the-way scholarly collections and journals). Furthermore, he has also had to omit any mention of the dance, an art form most highly regarded by the Asante and quite different from any European conception, as well as the fascinating talking-drum language, which demands a knowledge of non-Indo-European linguistics beyond the scope of most general readers. These limitations aside, *The Asante* is a most readable and informative introduction to Asante art and society, particularly during the last century.

It is based not only on the most recent printed sources but also on the author's intimate acquaintance with the land and its people gathered over many periods of fieldwork among them, and his empathy can be felt on page after page.

McLeod introduces his subject with accounts of the historical, material and environmental background. He rightly stresses the strong con-

trast in the African's mind between the fearsome, hostile and dangerous tropical forest teeming with wild beasts, invisible spirits and supernatural powers, and the areas cleared and controlled by man, their ordered towns and court organization, with their domesticated animals and cultivated farms. Only the hunter is at home in the forest, and back in civilization he tends to be an outsider, a loner. Perhaps something of this antithesis of safety and danger was felt in medieval and early Renaissance Europe, when so much of the land was still covered with dense forest. In Alderford's magnificent painting of "St George and the Dragon" we see a diminutive St George in a clearing in the oppressive, all-pervading forest, opposing single-handed this monstrous dragon of the woods. It might as well be an elephant in the distorted imagination of an African wood-carver, representing it as the spirit of the bush.

The succeeding chapters discuss various aspects of Asante art and material culture: goldwork, court regalia, stools and chairs, gold-weights (geometric and representational brass weights for weighing gold dust, much sought after by collectors today), brass vessels (*kudwo* and *forwa*), dress, pottery and wood-carving.

The power of Asante resided not only in its military strength but also in its deposits of gold, which was traded north to the Manding and thence across the Sahara to the Mediterranean, and south to the European trade fairs on the coast, which were variously held over the years by the leading European seapowers: Portuguese, Dutch, Brandenburg, English, French and Danish. The Asante themselves employed gold lavishly on court regalia (much of which was melted down annually and recast in new designs), as well as for personal adornment. These techniques were commonly practised by the goldsmiths; lost-wax casting, repoussé and the application

of gold foil. The latter misled some Europeans into believing that the Golden Stool was of solid gold: had this been the case it would probably have needed a crane to lift it!

Asante wood-carving varies considerably in both quality and purpose. Perhaps best known are the *aku'mma* or so-called fertility dolls, with their flat discoid heads set at a slight angle on a long neck bearing a series of love rings reminiscent of the man in the Michelin tyre advertisements. A woman will tuck one into the back of her wrapper as she would carry a real baby, to induce fertility and to ensure that the unborn child will be blessed with the Asante marks of beauty. But occasionally these dolls are given to little girls to play with and to evoke their maternal instincts at a young age, or after a woman has reached menopause and they can be of no further use to her, they may be offered to a local shrine. I contend that they are always female, not only because of a desire to maintain the matrilineage, but also, as I have been told more than once, because a woman wants daughters since they are soon able to help her by sweeping the compound and fetching water from the stand-pump, whereas boys go off with their father to the farms. So a different interpretation should be sought for those figure carvings, which are obviously male, and which are often very crudely done.

Probably the finest wood-carving among the Museum of Mankind's holdings is the now famous executioner with outstretched arms holding the victim's head, formerly in the Cockin/Bardley collection (it is a pity that acquisition details are omitted throughout), illustrated on page 174. But even in this instance the sculptor appears not to have been familiar with the pose, for without the stand on which it has now been attached, the figure topples forward on account of the weight of the arms and their burden. Even finer carv-

ings, particularly of a seated Queen Mother (?) and child, are known, but these are mostly in American collections.

The cognoscenti will be pleased to find that technical terms expressed in English usually have, added in brackets, their vernacular form in Twi, the language of the Asante. These terms have precise meanings which often come strangely to European ways of thought, and full explanations would be too lengthy and tedious for a book of this nature. Insistence on linguistic accuracy has led to the spelling of Asante itself, which may come as a surprise to some readers. In actual fact, many of the interpreters employed by the early Europeans on the coast were not themselves Asante but Ga from Accra, where not only the pronunciation but the language itself is different. T. E. Bowditch, who led the first official British mission to a king of Asante, adopted the local Ga version of the name and perpetuated it for the English thereafter in his highly informative account, published in 1819, entitled *Mission from Cape Coast Castle to Ashantee*, and so until recently it has remained.

One serious error has unfortunately escaped proof-reading. We are told (p. 12) that "The ruler of Asante at the start of the seventeenth century" was Osei Tutu. . . . For "seventeenth" read "eighteenth" century. That this was merely a *lapsus calami* is shown by the statement elsewhere (p. 65) that Osei Tutu flourished between 1700 and 1710. But since Osei Tutu was the founder of the Asante Confederation it is important that this should be corrected in later editions.

But to end on a congratulatory note: the selection of early photographs of Asante scenes is fascinating and gives an immediacy to the historical background which words alone cannot provide. For once an author has done his own picture research and largely succeeded in integrating the illustrations with the text.



# Boys' own

By Lindsay Duguid

T. H. WHITE:

The Maharajah and Other Stories  
192pp. Macdonald. £6.95.  
0 354 04070 5

T. H. White wrote the sixteen stories in *The Maharajah and Other Stories* when he was teaching at Stowe from 1932-35, and they are infused with a mixture of boyish enthusiasm and didactic purpose in much the same way as M. R. James's tales told to the scout camp when he was tutor at Eton. The predominant narrative voice is schoolmasterish and the stories, recounted with great relish, are full of the sort of things that might appeal to boys: feats of strength and courage, amazing details of the rare and strange, and instructions as to the correct way of doing things. Among the incidental pleasures are a description of the Maharajah's store-room, full of unpacked luxuries; the accommodation devised for the earl who believed himself to be a spaniel; and an authentic-sounding characterization of the smell of a wolf — "sour bread and stale bananas".

Three of the tales are traditional ghost stories, told by countesses, professors and gentlemen round a good fire. In "The Troll" a lonely traveller, the narrator's father, spends the night at an inn in Lapland and spies through the keyhole a gigantic troll devouring a young woman in a nightdress. "Just as my father applied his eye to the keyhole, the troll opened its mouth and bit off her head. Then, holding the neck between the bright blue lips, he sucked the bare meat dry. She shrivelled like a squeezed orange, and her heels kicked. The creature had a look of thoughtful ecstasy." In "Soft Voices at Passenheim" the rector is forced to remain in his lonely fenland church all night, playing the organ to keep the music-loving spirits at bay. And in "The Point of Thirty Miles" a wolf which the hounds have been pursuing until twilight is transmogrified at the kill:

"The werewolf's leg, gentlemen, that was cocked above the scrumage, turned pink, grew hairless, convulsed itself like a kicking frog's; and Chatterbox was trotting round the outside with a hand of human fingers in his mouth."

Other stories here are imaginative reconstructions featuring famous figures; they are viewed close up rather than at a historical distance. In "Not Until Tomorrow" the future Richard II is seen as ten-year-old Richard, treated contemptuously by his cousin Harry and hiding from Nanny in the garden. "A Link with Petulengro" describes the young Queen Victoria as "a determined little armful of femininity". And in "No Gratitudes" William Beckford snubs the simple trespasser who did not succumb to his seductive overtures.

These stories — and his other excursions into history "The Spaniel Earl" and "The Philistine Cursed David by His Gods" — demonstrate T. H. White's special vision of the past. This is not simply a matter of putting characters into costume and adding a few facts; nor is it a case of a shift in perspective such as Lytton Strachey went in for. It is rather a manifestation of a deeply-felt nostalgia for another (and better) age, a patriotism for another country, and it imbues the stories with life, feeling and the sense that the author has been there himself. (The schoolmasterish voice recalls Merle's in *The Once and Future King*, and he had been there himself.) White's discourses on social history are in an entirely naturalistic manner. In the early nineteenth century "Everybody better about everything, and nearly everybody was ruined." Under Charles II, "Morals had become insubstantial. . . . Buckhurst, Sedley and Ogilby swayed at the window of the Cock Tavern, without a stitch of clothing, and blind-drunk, shouting at the populace." White's evocation of history is helped, also, by his encyclopaedic use of the reader's imagination: we are asked to imagine what it must have been like to get up at 4.30 every morning and to compare Mr T of Kensington's successful

wager that he would drive his tandem at the first seven vehicles he met to a modern motorist's offer to drive at torries on the Great North Road. There is, in addition, a passionate re-creation of rural life: loving descriptions of field craft and of hunting, for example. These things are familiar from *The Age of Scandal* and *Refuge Victoria* and they recall the game where you choose the century you would like to have been born in and have to accept the drawbacks in terms of sanitation and medical science. T. H. White reveals in the drawbacks.

This is not the sum of his preoccupations, however, and many of the concerns which are discreetly hidden in the novels are laid bare in these stories. He is uneasy dealing with sex and is inclined to treat it with the kind of horrified respect which is in the Maharajah's wife's disgust at her husband's brown skin and nameless vice ("The spontaneous shudder of her look was more murderous to his manhood than any calculated insult") — tends to come out as prurient. His tale of modern adultery, "A Sharp Attack of Something or Other", is the least successful in the book and his account of the rape and murder of a woman in "A Kin to Love" sounds suspiciously gleeful. There is more than a whiff of E. M. Forster's later stories in the stalwart young men who stalk the pages (they symbolize primal innocence) and in the manifestations of the blind force of nature in the English countryside (the presentation of Pan as a rather pesky gamekeeper in "The Black Rabbit", is, however, less embarrassing than Forster's).

White's insistence on the hideousness of man, and his hatred of the modern age as exemplified in Aspros, advertisements, commercial travellers and the suburbs, show how far all his reconstructions of the past he remained imprisoned in the 1930s. When he forgets the need to be more at ease, and the tender lie to his blood sports without a conscience. He is best when at his simplest, and happiest out of doors.

# A Salazar saga

By Peter Lewis

CHARLES GIDLEY:

The River Running By  
500pp. Andre Deutsch. £6.95.  
0 253 97337 8

*The River Running* By is an unusual and much better than average example of a type of fiction now almost always and condescendingly labelled "popular" — the family saga. Romantic stereotyping, soap-opera melodramatics, and more recently the sex-and-violence syndrome have debased the form. Yet the fault is not in the genre itself but in what is often done with it. *The Rainbow*, after all, is an example of the kind; so is Patrick White's *The Tree of Man*. Charles Gidley is no Lawrence or White, but he does avoid many of the pitfalls of the family romance and he handles both sex and violence with commendable restraint.

Much of the interest of *The River Running* By derives from the unfamiliar novelistic territory Gidley explores: the British community in Portugal. Considering the long historical connection between the two countries (dating from the fifteenth century) and the quasi-colonial British presence around Oporto, it is surprising that so little has been written about this outpost of Empire. Apart from Ann Bridge, and Kingsley Amis in *I Like It Here*, English novelists have ignored Portugal — where, incidentally, one of the fathers of the English novel, Fielding, lies buried in Lisbon. Gidley's novel traces the history of an Anglo-Portuguese family involved in the port business, the Teapes, through the entire Salazar era, from 1933 to the "revolution" of 1974, with some glimpses into the past to establish the rootedness of such families in the country and with a brief postscript to bring one part of the narrative up to the present.

In the early stages, the central figure is the heir of the family business, Bobby Teape, who seems destined for a highly successful career. His relationships with women, however, are less satisfactory, partly because of the indelible influence of his domineering mother. His engagement to the daughter of a similar family, Joy Remington, is broken off abruptly, and on the rebound he finds himself a wife in England, Ruth, herself on the rebound from the man she really loves, who reappears immediately before her death more than thirty years later. Running parallel with the account of Bobby is that of an illiterate Portuguese girl, Natalia, orphaned at the age of fourteen when the man she wrongly believes to be her father and who has made her pregnant is killed in a shipping accident. The contrast

between the two life-styles, expatriate colonial and local peasant, could hardly be more extreme. While the British live in affluence and comfort, Natalia struggles to survive. The two narratives first merge when Bobby, before his marriage, picks up and rapes Natalia, then offers her cash, regarding this as almost one of his patriotic rights. Subsequently, Ruth employs Natalia as one of her servants, much to Bobby's concern, not only because of his guilty conscience but because he suspects that he is the father of Natalia's son, Eduardo.

As the narrative unfolds chronologically against a background of social and political upheavals — Salazar's fascist "New State", the rise of Hitler, the Second World War, postwar changes in England, the demise of Portugal's African empire, the death of Salazar and the end of his long-lived totalitarian régime — certain characters occupy the foreground for a time, then give way to others. Some of the best parts of the book are those concentrating on the Teapes' only child, Stella, a natural rebel, sexually precocious and adventurous, and — the ultimate badge of non-conformity — a sociology graduate from Leeds in the 1960s. Yet she cannot find an appropriate and fulfilling outlet for her energy which she turns increasingly against herself. Her marriage to a circusmaster (if initially flamboyant) RAF officer is doomed, and under the influence of her lesbian Marxist friend, Phillida, she leaves him. Her subsequent liaison in Portugal with her former teenage admirer, Eduardo, brings her a period of genuine happiness, but the wilfully destructive power of the British community, in the form of her step-mother (Joy, the girl Bobby rejected in 1934 but marries after Ruth's death), finally drives her to suicide.

Throughout the novel, Gidley relates the lives of the many individuals he writes about to the wider context in which they are all meshed, including radical changes in the business world and the political turmoil of Portugal in 1973-74. Yet the network of family and personal relationships predominates, and not even the apparently liberated Stella can escape its clutches. There is a distinctly Portuguese form of fatalism running through the novel, from the curse and violent death which opens to the curse and violent death near the end. Eduardo, significantly, becomes a successful singer of *fado*, that singularly Portuguese form of folk-singing expressing *saudade* — a blend of melancholy and nostalgia in the face of a world controlled by destiny. It is this *fado*-like mood in the novel as a whole that saves it from being soap opera, close as it sometimes is to this. With its precise sense of period detail, *The River Running* By would make a good television serial.

Drummond's ownership in the first instance is attested by the holograph inscription "Don Murmidumilla", an anagram signature in the patronymic manner of William Fowler his uncle. The signature occurs three times: on the title-page, on the subsidiary title-page to Part II, and on the last printed page. Drummond signed his copy of *Fairfax's Godfrey of Bulloigne* in the same style; and elsewhere used the form "Don Gemma de Muravill". These private extravaganzas suggest something of his involvement with the literature of romance.

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# Drummond's Copy of The Faerie Queene

By Alastair Fowler and Michael Leslie

In October 1977, Edinburgh University Library acquired at auction, with two other volumes, a copy of the first folio edition (1609) of Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, which had once belonged to the poet William Drummond of Hawthornden (1585-1649). These volumes are now in the Drummond Collection, which was begun by the poet himself through gifts in the early seventeenth century and now consists of well over 700 volumes.

A great deal is known of Drummond both as reader and as book collector. His library, which comprises perhaps 1,600 volumes, contained other copies of Spenser — *Amoretti* and *Epithalamion*, *Four Hymnes* and *The Shepherds' Calendar* — together with more than sixty volumes of vernacular poetry, more than double that number of Latin and Neo-Latin poetry, and a considerable quantity of Renaissance literary criticism, much of it Italian.

A full description of the newly purchased volumes has been given by M. C. T. Simpson, who also sketches what is known of his history after they left Drummond's possession. The copy of *The Faerie Queene* bears the arms of the Earls of Perth, in a state that probably indicates the second Earl. The outer motto, "DABIT TUTA PER UNDA VELA TIBI", which is close to Aeneid 5.796-7, alludes to the "three bars wavy" of the Earl's arms. As Mr Simpson points out, it may be the very "device", until now unknown, that provoked Drummond's treatise *A short Discourse upon Impresa*. In this, Drummond approves mottoes of two words "as gang warly"; but not those mentioning any of the arms' charges explicitly. For example, if there be the Figures of a Sea Waves, there be not in the word *Unda*, or *Sea-Wave* — a similar argument, although not obviously so, to Jonson's in *Part of the Kings Entertainment* (1616). The copy was possibly given to the Earl of Perth by Drummond; and it was probably brought back to Hawthornden by the poet's descendant Sir Francis Walker Drummond (1781-1844), whose bookplate it bears.

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Several of these were read in two languages, however, and the *Gerusalemme Liberata* in three: English, Latin and French. The marginalia are confined to *The Faerie Queene* VI.ii.7-11.18 and Mutability Cantos vii.28-53. Drummond would probably have been seeing the Cantos for the first time, at least in print, since they were not included in earlier editions; whereas the annotations of Book VI may have been prompted by his reading of Tasso. Most of the notes are of a kind that Drummond, an outstandingly well-read poet, was fond of making: they give the sources of imitations.

The most extensive instance is at VI.ii.17-32. At ix.17 Drummond gives a reference to *Gerusalemme Liberata* vii.17, and then at Spenser's Stanza 20 (Meliboe's explanation of his contentment), "all this is Tor, Tasso can. 7.1 Gier. of Erminia che poco è il desiderio e poco è il nostro bisogno, onde la vita si conservi" (*Gerusalemme Liberata* vii.11.1-2). (The ingeniousness is characteristic of these private notes; its tone does not imply censure of Spenser's closeness to Tasso, which in any case would hardly seem culpable to the grand imitator Drummond.) Then at VI.ii.24, 25, 26, 31 and 32 he notes: "DABIT TUTA PER UNDA VELA TIBI", which is close to Aeneid 5.796-7, alludes to the "three bars wavy" of the Earl's arms. As Mr Simpson points out, it may be the very "device", until now unknown, that provoked Drummond's treatise *A short Discourse upon Impresa*. In this, Drummond approves mottoes of two words "as gang warly"; but not those mentioning any of the arms' charges explicitly. For example, if there be the Figures of a Sea Waves, there be not in the word *Unda*, or *Sea-Wave* — a similar argument, although not obviously so, to Jonson's in *Part of the Kings Entertainment* (1616). The copy was possibly given to the Earl of Perth by Drummond; and it was probably brought back to Hawthornden by the poet's descendant Sir Francis Walker Drummond (1781-1844), whose bookplate it bears.

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And Professor C. P. Brand notes the imitation in *The Faerie Queene* VI.ii.24 ("And in the Prince's garden daily wrought / There I beheld such vileness as I never thought." "E henche fussi guardian de gli orti / Vidi e conobbi pur l'inique corti.") as "an interesting parallel which brings to mind that in the poets' lives: their unfulfilled hopes of court preferment and other misfortunes." Whether Drummond saw the pun in "wrought", he unfortunately does not record.

The note at VI.ii.15.1-5 is "See Tasso's Rinaldo ca. 11 St.90 of Florindo." The recognition of Pastorella by the "rosie marke" on her breast has an analogue in the *Rinaldo* — an important source book for *The Faerie Queene* — in the recognition of the male Florindo by his father. Florindo is found wounded and near to death by a knight errant, who takes him home, tends him and so discovers the flower-shaped mark that his own lady child had had (*Rinaldo* xl.88-90). Again Drummond quotes the corresponding Italian verses, which however are not conclusively similar: "da la pelle il signal rosso traspare come da vetro un fior d'orto vermiglio." The analogue was missed by Upton and Warton, but noticed by Koepfel and Blanchard, and accepted into the Variorum Spenser. Drummond may be right in seeing imitation of Tasso here; although there are other similar stories, such as that of Rosicler in the first part of Ortuze de Calahorra's *The Mirror of Princely Deeds and Knighthood* (translated 1578), or of Fiordelisa in Bolardo's *Orlando Innamorato* ll.xxvii.30 — in some ways closer. But Drummond apparently had no Bolardo, seems not to have used him and may not have read him. He owned a copy of the

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*Rinaldo*, however, which he listed among "Books red anno 1611". He may have read it with the rest of Tasso in 1610, as part of his effort to learn Italian during that year.

Drummond's note to VI.x.35.1-4 is "see S.P.S. Arcadia lib.1"; presumably referring to Dorus's rescue of Pamela from a bear, while the cowardly Dametas hides in a bush. Sidney's Dorus follows up his advantage over Pamela as Spenser's courteous knight would not have done; nevertheless the analogue with the rescue of Pastorella is close. It goes unnoticed in the Variorum Spenser and in more recent editions, but receives a general mention from William Nelson. Sidney's *Arcadia* was a favourite with Drummond: he had read it at least twice, in 1606 and 1609. Unfortunately, his copy seems now to be missing.

Another favourite romance was Heliodorus's *Aethiopica* (again lost), which Drummond strained his eyes reading in his seventeenth year. At *The Faerie Queene* VI.x.40.5-7, he notes "See Heliodorus". The reference is to the rescue of Chariclea from the thieves' den, near the end of *Aethiopica* Book I. This not very thorough grounding in such prosody as was available, since he attended Edinburgh High School during the restoration of Alexander Hume the phonetician and author of *Grammatica Nova*. Drummond's illustrative circumflex above the "a" in "hard" is to be interpreted in the light of standard theory and practice around 1600, according to which this accent might be used to indicate either a long quantity or a stressed syllable.

Quantity and stress were seldom clearly distinguished; and quantities were often described as for the most part fixed. Alexander Gill, however, could write of accent altering quantity: "Every syllable which has an acute or circumflex accent is long. . . . The most vowel in a final syllable followed by a single or double liquid is either lengthened or shortened under the influence of an accent. . . . The same thing will also be caused by an accent in rapid monosyllables, as . . . 3âr [jâr]." It is quite possible, therefore, that Drummond is noticing the length and stress of Spenser's "farre" — even, perhaps, appreciating it as a mimetic rhythm that conveys the extent of the search for the squirrels. The note is of considerable value, one of the very earliest comments of the kind in English to have survived.

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he elsewhere called "Time's purpled naquiers".

Such signposting marginalia are commonly dismissed as offside. But they provide vital evidence of reading methods. Here they prove that Spenser's iconographical programme was followed closely and worked out in some detail. Those who hold that without necessarily loving his readers Spenser could refine on an expected and familiar scheme — specifically, that he departed from the Ptolemaic order of the planets, closing the sequence with *Mars/Saturn/Jupiter* instead of *Mars/Jupiter/Saturn*, to express the interdependence of order and mutability. Similarly with the theory that he varied the zodiacal series by associating Jupiter's house Sagittarius with Chiron, who was Saturn's seed; and Saturn's Capricornus with the goat "wherewith Dine Jove was nourished". These interpretations have found their way into recent editions of the poem; but they are probably not yet uncontroversial. Some critical interest, therefore, attaches to the fact that Drummond traced the represented months in order and noticed the sequence of planets to be "Mars, Saturne and Jove"; so that he was in a position to notice Spenser's subtleties. The former student of astronomy at Edinburgh University and owner of many advanced works on astronomy would hardly be ignorant of the Ptolemaic order of proximity of the planets. It can no longer be argued that Spenser's earliest readers would have been oblivious to such patterns.

Besides these verbal annotations, Drummond's copy contains another series of manuscript markings. In different ink or crayon. With one exception (II.vi.13.1-4), these occur in the second half of the poem: again reflecting perhaps the marginalian's relative unfamiliarity with Spenser's second and third instalments. In all, some eighty passages are marked. Some of the markings indicate *sententiae* or significant places in the narrative or allegory; but chiefly they draw attention to passages of special effectiveness or beauty, such as the *blazon* of the captive Serena (VI.viii.42) or Scudamour's description of a garden at the Temple of Venus (IV.x.24). Spenser's rhetoric, astronomical imagery, and iconographical descriptions all receive attention. Of course these marks need not have been made by the same hand; but their concentration on literary skills suggests the interests of the fellow poet. It is not impossible that the symbols at IV.x.20, 21 and 36 mark passages to be consulted from *Forth Feasting*: the passage on Scottish rivers ("Tweed which no

more our Kingdoms shall divide") and exotic rivers:

While as my hills enjoy'd Thy royal Chaire  
They did not envie *Libors* haugh-  
ing Streams  
Nor wealthie *Tages* with his gol-  
den Ore,  
Nor cleare *Hydaspes* which on  
Pearles doth rore,  
Empampred *Gange* that sees the  
Sunne new borne . . .

Drummond's copy of *The Faerie Queene* contains tantalizingly few notes. But there are enough to give an idea of how well, in different circumstances, he might have edited the poem. One of the most widely read Scottish or English poets—better read than Jonson, for example, in French and Italian—he would have been well equipped to supply Spenser's European literary context. As it is, we are left to guess at the interpretations, for the most part, from the way he constructs his own imitations of Spenser: imitations found throughout his poetry, and marked everywhere by cultivated understanding. To these indirect but valuable insights, the marginalia add a few more direct glimpses.

We should like to thank Professor W. Beattie, Professor D. Abercrombie, Dr R. D. S. Jack and Mr M. Simpson for their generous help and valuable suggestions.

<sup>1</sup> His donation is described by L. W. Sharp in the *University of Edinburgh Journal*, volume 5 (1932-3), pp 125-32.

<sup>2</sup> See Robert H. Macdonald *The Library of Drummond of Hawthornden* (Edinburgh).

<sup>3</sup> *University of Edinburgh Journal*, 5 (1939-40), pp 42-8.

<sup>4</sup> *Torquato Tasso* (Cambridge, 1965), p 238.

<sup>5</sup> *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia*, edited by J. Robertson (Oxford, 1973), pp 51-3.

<sup>6</sup> *The Poetry of Edmund Spenser* (New York, 1963), p 291.

<sup>7</sup> *MS. Memorials*; see Macdonald *The Library of Drummond*, pp 11-131.

<sup>8</sup> See Derek Attridge *Well-Welshed Syllables: Elizabethan Verse in Classical Metres* (Cambridge, 1974), chapters four and five, especially pp 61-2; Alexander Hume *Cromwellian Novels* (Edinburgh, 1912; facsimile reprint Newton, 1969). Book 1, chapter two, "De quantitate syllabae", Hume advocated the marking of quantities as a standard orthographic procedure.

<sup>9</sup> *Logonomia Anglica* (1619), chapter 26; translated and edited by B. Daniels and A. Gabrielsson (Stockholm, 1972), p 177.

<sup>10</sup> *Alastair Fowler Spenser and the Numbers of Time* (1964), p 231f; *Triumphal Forms* (Cambridge, 1970), p 60.

<sup>11</sup> Eg Macdonald *The Library of Drummond*, catalogue items 144, 173, 174, 177, 189.

## Coming to conclusions

By Richard Brown

D. A. MILLER:  
*Narrative and Its Discontents*  
Problems of Closure in the Traditional Novel  
300pp. Guildford: Princeton University Press, £12.60.  
0 691 06459 8

Ordinary readers of novels have always had a strong awareness of endings. Some would rather block their ears than hear what happens at the end of a book they are about to read, while there are others who cannot resist a surreptitious glance at the final pages just to see. In recent years, though, the question of novel endings has also become a favourite with literary academics in that area of theory which has been called the poetics of the novel.

Ends have become more of an intellectual concern against the background of Jacques Derrida's neologistic and punning conception of writing as *différance* (both a differentiation and a deferral of ultimate meaning) and of Roland Barthes's emphasis on the characteristically heavy "closure" of the structured nineteenth-century "readerly" novel. In Barthes and in ensuing discussions, this "closure" at the end of the novel is seen not just as a termination but as an orientation of the sequence of events that has been narrated, as the last term in the semantic chain which gives significance to what has gone before.

The comparatively painless appropriation of this kind of discussion by Anglo-American critics owes much to the sanction of respectability offered to it some fifteen years ago by Frank Kermode in *The Sense of an Ending*. Kermode, most memorably, set fiction in the context of apocalyptic beliefs, arguing that we need fictional endings because of a conflict between the time of our own lives, which ends, and the time of the world, which goes on. His work, in part, depended on a sense of historical change and on unperpetuated humanist assumptions about deep psychological needs; but it nevertheless offered an essentially formalist study of fictions, as types of order rather than as direct representations of the world. The most important thing about fictions was seen to be that they have ends: in their ending is the condition of their being.

Miller will have none of this. His approach is much more narrowly formalist, enclosed in that strict structuralist Trappism which, in insisting on the separation of the linguistic sign from its referent, makes it pretty near impossible to talk about history or the real world, and a novel's relation to them. As he himself puts it in the preface: "The conflict that

Like all new debates, this one can be seen to have a long history. It was Aristotle, of course, who stressed that tragedies should have beginnings, middles and ends and described their *dénouements* as central structuring movements. But the extent to which "closure" has caught on in America now may be seen in books like Barbara Smith's *Poetic Closure* and Marianna Torgovnick's *Closure in the Novel*, and in a recent special issue of the periodical *Nineteenth Century Fiction* devoted to "Narrative Endings". It may not be long before we have periodicals called *Narrative Endings* with special numbers devoted to the nineteenth century.

This new book by D. A. Miller clearly depends upon the existence of these recent discussions and is in many ways typical of a second generation of post-structuralist thought in America. Miller apparently feels little need to defend or justify his approach or make any elaborate exposition of his terms of reference. A footnote suffices to explain that "the word 'closure' will be used instead of 'ending' throughout this study" (suggesting that neither the terminology nor the concept are so problematic any more). The theoretical issues he presents are well-digested and his definitions correspondingly precise. He is also quite assured in his sense of the applicability of the distinctions he employs, strictly limiting himself to this one aspect of certain canonical literary works.

Although this rigour is welcome, it does mean that we have lost the enormously exhilarating critical sweep of an early study like Kermode's. Certain European post-structuralists, moreover, would strongly object to Miller's approach. They would hold that post-structuralist theory constitutes a challenge to bourgeois consciousness and that it is not employable as just another kind of literary analysis. Even Kermode's book, we may remember, gestures towards the political, making telling, if scattered, references to the Jewish experience in the Second World War.

Miller will have none of this. His approach is much more narrowly formalist, enclosed in that strict structuralist Trappism which, in insisting on the separation of the linguistic sign from its referent, makes it pretty near impossible to talk about history or the real world, and a novel's relation to them. As he himself puts it in the preface: "The conflict that

interests me occurs not between the novel and its referent, but, within the novel, between the principles of production and the claims of closure to a resolved meaning."

Miller thus dispenses with the real world and devotes himself to explaining narrative through its internal logic. The core of his project is to distinguish between the "narratable", which constitutes the novel, from the "non-narratable", which is its "closure". He argues that certain states of affairs, certain characters or discourses, are inherently disruptive, unhappy and irritating to the novel's sense of order and that they have to be, as it were, written away so that the peace of that order may be regained. His main contribution may be seen as the elaboration of the paradox that the narrative desires to achieve that state of affairs which will cause it to be no more. The narrative is, in a sense, that which discontents it. He further suggests that the answer which the novel's "closure" offers, even in the supposedly "classical" nineteenth-century novel, may often only obliquely by substitution (or displacement) satisfy these discontents of the narrative.

His demonstration of this focuses on three novelists. In Jane Austen a state of propriety (proper marriages and social arrangements) is the end to which the fiction moves, and so the novels must narrate only scandal and impropriety. "Six years of separation and suffering might have been spared", says Captain Wentworth at the end of *Persuasion* and, in Miller's terms, this dispensability is typical of narrative as seen from its end. In *Middlemarch*, he argues, there are three levels of the "narratable" and George Eliot's characteristic "closure" is a form of uncertain resolution. Still more uncertain is "closure" in Stendhal, where there is some anticipation of the modernist freedom from plots and ends.

There are examples throughout the book of an irritatingly anachronistic determination to read everything in structuralist terms, as when Lydgate arrives in Middlemarch to find the old medical system there "a system of differences", or indeed when the words of Captain Wentworth are taken to exemplify a theory which he could not possibly have known. It is regretted, variously, that neither Valéry nor Henry James "went on" with their theorizing; they would, Miller implies, almost certainly have become structuralists.

But the prime objection to the book, which is well-argued in itself, must be against the arid formalism of the terms it sets up. Though Miller has many insights into the psychology and logic of narrative, the question remains whether there is much value in distinctions so broad as to include (as he does at one point) Jane Austen and de Sade under the same umbrella. Similarly, Miller compares the temporary disappearance of narrative "closure" to the child's fascination with the disappearance and reappearance of his toys, his repetitive cries of "fort!" (gone!) and "da!" (here it is!) observed by Freud in *The Pleasure Principle*. (One presumes it was Lacan's striking appropriation of the idea in his elaboration of the role of language in the child's unconscious that prompted the use of this particular bit of Freud.) Few readers, though, will see much point in a comparison as general as this, the appeal of which seems to reside as much in giving the impression of having absorbed a difficult and paradoxical area of discussion as in any real contribution to our knowledge of narrative.

To look at Miller's summing up is to confirm these reservations: "To what advantage, we must finally ask, does such an opposition function in the novel? In the end it may only be that it functions to 'prove its own possibility'." This is a disturbingly weak and tautologous conclusion and one, with which we will be most unlikely to live happily ever after.

## commentary

### H.G. v G.K.C.

By Humphrey Carpenter

The Gallows In My Garden  
BBC Radio

*Saturday Night Theatre*, for so long a repository of tired whodunnits, seems to be looking up a bit. Just over a month ago there was a striking radio adaptation of John Rae's novel *The Castard Boys*, and more recently (July 4) a sour little comedy by Bruce Stewart based on the ideological quarrel between H.G. Wells and Hilaire Belloc, one of the more entertaining literary squabbles of the 1920s.

Wells reissues his *Outline of History*, revised and in serial form, his second wife Jane patiently typing out page after page of it while Wells nips across the Channel to amuse himself with a series of mistresses at his French house. Belloc, a foe of the first edition of the *Outline*, greets its reappearance with a series of articles of his own, eventually reducing Wells to fearful collapse just as he

learns that Jane is dying of cancer. G. K. Chesterton thinks that Belloc has gone a bit far, even in the cause of Catholicism and truth, but then discovers that what appeared to be signs of repentance in Wells are merely indications that the scoundrel has got a new mistress. George Bernard Shaw hangs about on the sidelines, finding the whole thing richly comic.

It could, perhaps, have been a good play, but caricature quickly took over. Shaw sounded like an Irish barman and Freddie Jones's Chesterton was a boozy Winnie-the-Pooh: "Have another pint, G.K.C." (Sounds of ale being downed.) "Ha! 'would be folly to refuse, Hilary.' The constant use of initials produced an effect of self-parody: 'G.K.C. Good gracious! 'My dear Jane, I've come to see H.G.' Ronald Lacey as Wells was on a higher plane than this, and managed to get across a good deal of intellectual and sexual anguish; his accent and rather sloppy style of speech were, one imagines, just what Wells spoke like, but the script gave him little chance. Were we supposed to sympathize with Wells's predicament, or to side with

the Catholic mafia, or merely to laugh at the whole thing like Shaw? Was Wells supposed to seem tragic or merely silly?

Worst of all, Mr Stewart's play gave only the most superficial indications of what the whole quarrel was about. Both the *Outline* and Belloc's outraged protests were made to seem more noisy rhetoric, and any real exposition of the conflict was abandoned in favour of dialogue that consisted chiefly of gobblets from the writings of the principal characters. Chesterton and Shaw reciting "Lepanto" antiphotically as a commentary on the mustering of Catholic forces against Wells was bearable, but most of the time the effect was less subtle. Travelling in a taxi that loses itself north of Regent's Park, Shaw remarks: "Why, my dear Chesterton, it's like that poem of yours — 'The night we went to Birmingham by way of . . . Where was it, now?'"

Still, *The Gallows In My Garden* (the title comes from a Chesterton poem which refers to the rumpled) was far better than the run-of-the-mill Saturday night thriller, irritating only in that the chance of something better still was thrown away.

### Galley slaves

By Patricia Craig

Room  
Royal Court Theatre Upstairs

"All I could do was to offer you an opinion upon one minor point — a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction." Virginia Woolf's celebrated pronouncement is the starting-point for an interesting experiment in political theatre. *Room*, devised by Natasha Morgan (who also takes the leading role), opens in naturalistic style with a young wife setting out her domestic grievances in a letter addressed to her thoughtless husband. Quickly, however, the emblematic and expository take over. The lights are dimmed, and a female voice is heard lecturing on Aphra Behn. The wife reappears in the uniform of a housemaid.

Like the Woolf essay, *Room* progresses in a roundabout, discursive, gently mocking way, with pieces of social satire, historical by-play, and symbolic action (galley proofs suddenly sprout from the floor like an army of dragons' teeth; the over-

wrought wife dashes off at a moment of domestic discord to shoot the baby, raising a nervous laugh from the audience) thrown in to underline the central proposition. To avoid infringement of copyright held by the Woolf estate, the author of *Room* was obliged to make certain changes in her material; so, instead of Virginia Woolf herself, we have an imaginary novelist called Lillian Raine. To quote Woolf's remark on another subject, "a very queer, composite being thus emerges". It's a dummy figure for part of the time; it behaves badly at the dinner table, being highly strung; and its bad behaviour is the subject of a later discussion between two outraged guests ("caviar and coleslaw all over the place"). The noise of parties — those pre-war Cambridge luncheon parties where the talk went on "swimmingly . . . agreeably, freely, amusingly" — is constantly in the background.

The techniques of parody, whimsy, shifting viewpoints, anecdote and outspokenness are all used to good effect; but sometimes the method is nearly as elusive as it's allusive. The figure in the white Victorian petticoat and bee-keepers' headgear, for instance: is it Emily Dickinson, Sylvia Plath, or a conflated of the two? Or the blind fury

with th' abhorred shears? (Whatever its implication, the visual effect is striking.) The function of the single male actor (Nigel Hughes) is to embody, in various ways, unthinking prejudice: at one moment he is Oscar Browning, declaring that "the best woman [is] intellectually the inferior of the worst man"; at another he is the average blunt critic who finds something to upset him in the rhythm of Virginia Woolf's (Lillian Raine's) prose: "What is she waffling on about? Why doesn't she get to the point?" He is also the husband in the con- temporary set piece who is responsible for the put-upon, crowded condition of his wife and the consequent sorry waste of her talent ("language that is not current becomes de- function"). In order to write this letter to you," the heroine states with some relish, "I have had to leave your daughter crying in the garden for two hours — and it is snowing."

Natasha Morgan puts on an adept performance (well supported by Jenny Carey and Helen Cooper, as well as Nigel Hughes); her inventiveness and acuity are impressive. As an attempt to render social forces in dramatic terms, though, *Room* suffers a little from the lack of a strong narrative line.

### Sweated out

By Nicholas Shakespeare

Steaming  
Theatre Royal, Stratford E.15

It says much for Nell Dunn's powers as the writer of *Poor Cow* and *Up the Junction* that the characters in her first stage play at the Theatre Royal, Stratford East, are strong enough to support a play in which little happens.

The setting of *Steaming* is an East End Turkish bath which becomes a regular watering-hole for five women. As Violet, the benign attendant puts it, "Steam's a good place for crying . . . it gets all the acids and poisons out", and the lives of her clientele are empty enough for them to spend the whole time baring themselves and their fantasies in Jenny Tiramanni's cold and shabbily Roman set.

The play is flannelled out by their shared confidences. Made in cued monologues rather than in conversa-

tion, these become mockingbird repetitions about domestic tedium, economic hardship and the tyranny of men. At times one can sympathize with the husbands who have deserted them and with the local Council's decision, made rather late in the play, to close down the bath and build a library in its place. Nell Dunn perhaps misses a dramatic chance in not allowing us to see any of these men — except the caretaker through a frosted window — and the play only unwraps with a campaign to save the bath an ensuing sit-in and the final moment when all, at last, take the plunge.

For all its structural flaws, *Steaming* is a very funny and affectionate play. Josie, a tempestuous and pleasure-seeking cockney, is brought fiercely to life by Georgina Hale, fighting for what she wants as well as against the men who provide it. Her growing intimacy with Nancy, a "frigid divorcee who is prevented by middle-class stigmas from similarly enjoying herself", is acutely presented. So too is the coming out of Mrs Meadows's repressed and deranged daughter, Dawn. Brenda

Blethyn's performance is never overplayed. Her naked appearance at the end, after two hours in plastic wrap, is so effective a tour de force that it makes one wonder if Roger Smith could have made a more discriminate use of nudity in his production. In revealing everything so early on, Patti Love's portrayal of a painfully type-cast hippy is especially fleeced of interest.

"When old men are very lecherous, their heads and loins are so unpleasant", Virginia Woolf wrote when tea with a retired civil servant had taken an unexpected turn. The letter is one of a wealth of literary and historical manuscripts being sold at Sotheby's on July 20 and 21. There are poetic manuscripts by Shakespeare plays marked by Sir Henry Irving, and scores of other materials. Among the modern items are designs, blue-prints, photographs and reports about living in space, the work of Raymond Loewy, NASA's "habitability consultant".

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## Red rosebuds and coal-black mud

By Roy Palmer

ROGER De V. RENWICK:  
*English Folk Poetry*  
Structure and Meaning  
270pp. Batsford, £12.50.  
0 7134 3681 6

Roger De V. Renwick tells us that he is writing specifically for "collectors, analysts, and lovers of folk poetry", and that his primary goal is "to discover implicit meanings in texts". Rather more than half the book is concerned with traditional songs which circulated orally. A detailed study of "The Bold Fisherman" concludes that, whatever its possible connection with Gnostic symbolism, the song, with its theme of a lover unrecognized on his return, is very close to many other pieces dealing with love.

In a chapter on songs of sexual liaison (152 of them to be precise), Renwick establishes three categories, which are then further sub-divided: the symbolic (such as "The Seeds of Love"), with its flower code of red rosebuds for passion, and the like), the euphemistic ("O you've won my heart, for ever, Jack / Your master's no man for me / For he can't come with his top-tap-top / Not half so well as thee").

and the metaphorical (in which hares are pursued over mountains, meadows mown or not, and card games won or lost, as extended sexual metaphors). The three categories coincide, says Renwick, respectively with "being", "becoming", and "behaving", the second apparently being "more fitted to an industrial era". This seems somewhat fanciful, especially if one looks at songs of the Industrial Revolution which deliberately exploit new opportunities for sexual imagery. Steam-looms and threshing-machines fall into the metaphorical mode, not the euphemistic.

Perhaps the best part of the book deals with the traditional and popular verse of Yorkshire, which no doubt reflects folk work done there by Renwick. Folk song was a national phenomenon which also interacted with particular localities. A song circulating nationally would have local variations; however a local song might times with changes, sometimes not. One needs therefore to be careful when designating a song as local, and some of Renwick's examples are a good deal less local than he thinks. "On Leeds becoming a sea-port town" was widely circulated with the name changed to "Manchester" or "Birmingham", or even left blank so that a singer could insert whatever location he wished. "The Wensleydale Lad" shows the innocent abroad in Leeds, with its factories ("Owd Ned turn'd

iv'ry wheel, an' iv'ry wheel a strap / Begor, 'said I to t' master-man, 'Owd Ned's a rare strong chap"). The church. Yet the section on "Leeds Owd Church" was originally written about Manchester Old Church; the song was printed under various titles on broadsides as far afield as London; and it is still current, not only in Yorkshire, but also in Lancashire.

Renwick goes on to discuss what is indisputably local verse, written by identifiable people such as Mrs Martha Bairstow. These writings, "it seems to me, have their origin in popular verse-forms such as the epigram and weather-rhymes. They derive principally, however, from the jog-trot music-hall monologues of the nineteenth century. These are usually either jocular or sentimental, as can be seen from the work of a well-known current practitioner, Mike Harding. They seldom achieve either the depth or force of traditional poetry.

Mrs Bairstow is an ordinary person who writes popular verse, but this does not automatically make her work folk poetry; for this is a form with its own disciplines. The point does not seem to have been taken by Renwick, though it is an interesting analysis of reactions by local working-class poets to the Lofthouse Collection, edited by 1973. Of the poems treated: one is immediately recognizable, with its irregular metre and its efforts to speak with an individual voice, as an attempt at poetry

about court. The others are all popular verse of different kinds — hymn, song, march, memorial — yet only some are akin to traditional utterance, and one is directly fashioned on a traditional model: "Six days we pumped to get them out / An air pocket might have saved them / The news we dreaded came at last / The pocket it was empty / Not one had reached the precious air / And in coal-black mud now they lay / No more their families' lives to save / No more to see the light of day". Even this, so far as I know, failed the ultimate test of folk poetry, that of achieving oral transmission and variation, independently of its first beguiler.

In his analysis Renwick makes use of the terminology, not only of folklore, but of cultural anthropology and social history. He also draws upon "phenomenological approaches to culture, studies in communication, and general systems theory". This unfortunately leads to obfuscating. Speaking of the Lofthouse poems, for example, we hear that they "constitute one set whose members share in general a negative feedback model of Self/Other relationships". Still, though the style is irritating, and though Renwick's interpretations are rarely new, "revelations" he claims, he is certainly worth reading, and his aim of bringing "contemporary working-class poetry into folklorists' purview" will undoubtedly have been furthered by this stimulating book.